CHRISTIANITY CONSIDERED

A GUIDE FOR SKEPTICS AND SEEKERS

JOHN FRAME

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To My Students

If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.…

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,

nor the heart of man imagined,

what God has prepared for those who love him"—

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

—The Apostle Paul

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PREFACE

I have written several books and a number of articles touching on the subject of Christian apologetics (defenses of Christian truth claims),[1] but this book is rather different from the others. My previous writings in that field have been largely directed toward Christians, seeking to help them develop a biblical apologetic method. This book is intended for inquirers.

I believe that the Van Tillian presuppositional school represents the soundest overall apologetic methodology. But in the literature of that movement, it is rare to find a book that can be handed to a non-Christian inquirer to present and defend the truth of Scripture. Cornelius Van Til wrote an excellent pamphlet called "Why I Believe in God"[2] that was published as an evangelistic tract. But the rest of his writings were for Christians, mainly for seminarians. The same is true for most of the secondary literature on Van Til and his apologetics. The late Greg Bahnsen had been trying to "take it to the streets," and the fruits of that effort can be found in his taped lectures and debates.[3] But works in print are also needed, and the present book attempts to meet that need.

In view of that purpose, I will not deal here in any explicit way with questions of apologetic methodology. My views on that subject have not changed. I believe that the methods used in this book are consistent with those I have advocated elsewhere. But here the methodology will be very much below the surface. I have banished jargon, except for a few theological expressions that I have tried to define clearly for my readers. My goal is to speak the language of the inquirer, not that of theologians. If I fail to do that adequately, I hope to challenge others to do a better job.

I am also trying to be as concise as possible. I have written theologies of different lengths: very large tomes in the *Theology of Lordship* series, a big single volume (*Systematic Theology*), a short single volume (*Salvation Belongs to the Lor*d), and now this one, which, besides being an apologetic,

could also be used as a beginners' primer on the doctrines of the Christian faith.

My training is in philosophy, and the structure of this book will, unlike other apologetics books, be somewhat more like philosophy than theology. When someone asks why they should believe in Christ, I want to ask that person how they can claim to know anything at all: let's start from the beginning. Too often we make certain assumptions about knowledge, reason, evidence, presuppositions, hypotheses, inferences, and so on, that prejudice our conclusions in one way or another. When Christians do that, their opponents typically charge them with prejudice. But the charge can often be fairly reversed. In this book, I will assume that epistemology, the theory of knowledge, is itself a matter of controversy and discussion. It has been controversial as long as it has been discussed. I believe that when we consider the theory of knowledge as a serious, debatable issue, the case for Christianity emerges stronger than when the answer to that debate is taken for granted. So I will discuss the nature of knowledge in chapters 1–5, before the substantive issues of God, the authority of Scripture, and so on.

Besides its unusual topical structure, this book will also be somewhat nontraditional in its argumentation. I confess that when I look over other apologetics books, including some I myself have written, the argumentation often has little to do with the considerations which I actually find most persuasive. In these other books, I and others have striven to do justice to the traditional questions of apologetics: theistic proofs, historical evidences, answers to the problem of evil, and so on. But when I myself have gone through periods of doubt, and been restored through God's grace, those standard arguments have provided very little help. I don't regard those standard arguments as worthless, by any means, and of course I must be careful not to judge the value of these arguments by their effect upon me personally. Certainly they have been helpful to many through the ages, and they will continue to have their legitimate place. And I will not avoid those arguments entirely here; there will be some overlap between this book and my previous ones. But I intend here to try some different approaches, emphasizing some ideas which play a greater role in my own thinking than do the standard arguments.

I also believe that the nonstandard approaches of this volume may coincide somewhat more closely with the Bible's own style of argumentation. Although Scripture governs our apologetic, I don't think we are restricted to using the Bible's style. Yet there is benefit, I think, in knowing what that style is and being free to make use of it, and of being able to find functional equivalents to that style in contemporary language.

Of course, far more important than any argument in leading people to faith is the Spirit of God. Our Lord said, "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). The Spirit uses arguments, surely, because God's word itself is full of them. But the real force of the arguments will be hidden unless God's Spirit plants faith in the heart of the hearer or reader. And so I begin this venture in the prayer that the Spirit will accompany this book to plant the truth of the gospel deep in the hearts of my readers.

CHAPTER 1

CHRISTIANITY AS INTELLECTUAL RADICALISM

Have you ever fantasized that there might be a whole different way to think? a drastic innovation which leads us to insights now unimaginable? that opens our eyes to see things in the world we might otherwise have thought impossible? that leads us to decisions in life which, however bewildering they may be to friends and society, produce incomparable satisfactions?

Perhaps you remember Plato's story of the cave dwellers, who preferred to live in the shadows, who misunderstood those who had actually seen the light. Could there be a difference like that among people, so great that only a contrast like "darkness vs. light" would adequately convey its dimension?

The counterculturalists of the 1960s often thought of drugs that way: a gateway to a higher consciousness, the way to experience higher levels of reality. I doubt that they found what they were looking for. The drug experience wrought more destruction than illumination on the whole. But their dream lives on. I suspect that many of us share it.

If there were such a new mind available to us, how would we ever find it? For if we are locked into our old mind, the assertions of the new mind might well seem ridiculous, impossible. How can people who have spent all of their lives in caves begin to comprehend even the possibility of a light like the sun?

Well, perhaps the new mind is a gift, something granted to us supernaturally. I think that is the ultimate answer. But for now, let us simply observe a more human consideration, that the quest will demand an unusual degree of openmindedness: a willingness to admit the possibility that at least some of our timeworn ideas of what is true and right and possible and impossible may not be accurate.

Christians have often been conservative, even traditionalist, and many think of Christianity as a reactionary ideology. But the Christianity I defend in this volume is radical, rather than conservative, traditionalist, or reactionary.

It calls us to engage in a self-criticism more profound than any other, one which humbles us to the roots of our existence. And that self-criticism must be comprehensive: criticism not only of our moral and religious life, but of our intellectual habits as well.

In this book I will explore some familiar questions of apologetics such as the existence of God and the resurrection of Jesus, but I intend to present these and other issues in somewhat unfamiliar ways. The familiar arguments are not worthless, by any means, and I will rely on them at points. But in developing the main line of argument, I believe we can improve on the tradition. I have in mind particularly two kinds of improvement: one focusing on the past, another on the present and future.

Traditional apologetics has, first, often failed to show clearly what it was that made the early preaching of Christ so persuasive to people in the first century. Why was it that so many people found this message entirely credible? In the New Testament record, there are no theistic proofs, not many complicated arguments; yet the preaching of Christ outlined in the New Testament led many to firm conviction. The epistemology of this process may seem somewhat mysterious; but I think that new light can be shed upon it, light that will illumine the Bible's own distinctive rational structure.

Second, I believe that the distinctive rational structure of biblical Christianity will help us better to evaluate the cogency of the Christian message for our own time and into the future. There is no doubt that for many people today the traditions of Christian apologetics are no longer persuasive. Indeed, as I shall argue, the traditional apologetic's collapse of credibility in our time has created a crisis of faith for many and, for others, despair of ever coming to faith. Modernity and postmodernity have seemed to present unprecedented obstacles to Christian faith.

But there are resources in the Bible's own apologetic that will overcome —quite surprisingly—the objections of modernity and postmodernity. Remarkably, the most biblical apologetic will also prove to be the most contemporary. This is not surprising to Christians. If the Bible is really God's truth, then its message will be ever fresh, ever new, ever powerful to overcome unbelief and to create faith.

My view is that the traditional apologetic has been strong insofar as it has reflected the Bible's own implicit apologetic; insofar as it has not, it has always been weak, and those weaknesses have only been magnified by the modern challenges. But in essence Christian faith has always been grounded in the Bible's own epistemology, even when it has sought additional confirmation through inferior argumentation.

In any case (please allow me to employ the directness of the second person), it is important for you to consider the Christian claim. In my own view, it is a matter of eternal life or death for you. In your own view, for the present, it may be only a matter of completing your education. But if you read this book merely to advance your education, I hope and pray that its biblical apologetic will surprise you, that you will find far more here than you had ever imagined. Not that this book is filled with original insight. What surprises it contains are actually very old: biblical thoughts which are not usually found in present-day books. What I hope to do in this volume is simply to present a biblical way of knowing God in contemporary language. If I succeed in this purpose, I have no doubt that it will be worth your while. It could open to you the resources of the new mind, and access to God's new world.

CHAPTER 2

WHY YOU ARE NOT FULLY EDUCATED UNTIL YOU HAVE CONSIDERED THE CHRISTIAN TRUTH CLAIM

The first step on the way to the new mind is to consider the claims of Christianity. In this chapter, I hope to motivate you to do so.

One cannot be truly educated without taking some interest in Christianity. Christianity is at least one of the most fundamental influences in the formation of Western culture. Within that culture, not only religion, but also art, philosophy, science, economics, and politics have to some extent been either developments of Christian ideas or reactions against Christianity. In Western history, the role of the church and of individual faith has long been central to political debates and armed conflicts. As for non-Western cultures, much of their recent history has been a history of opening to the West and therefore to Christian influences—although, to be sure, the West has simultaneously been opening itself to non-Western ways of thinking and living.

Today, there are additional reasons for secular-minded people to be interested in Christianity. Some respected scientists, for example, have found significant analogies between the big bang theory of the origin of the universe and the biblical doctrine of creation. The "religious right" in the United States has reasserted the political activism typical of Christianity, after many years during which evangelical Christians were untypically passive. And of course today this movement has been joined by an equally activist religious left.

Some would claim that the reinvigoration of Christianity, together with that of Islam, new-age mysticism, eastern religions, paganism, and other movements, is leading the modern world into a new religious age, an abandonment of the secularism dominant over the last 200 years. Others, however, would claim that society today is more secular than ever, and that religious people are asserting themselves out of desperation. In any case,

debates over the place of religion (and, in the West, especially Christianity) in modern life are becoming both more frequent and more heated in our time.

BUT IS IT TRUE?

So it is important for educated people to know many things about Christianity: its doctrines, piety, ethics, history, social and political influence, and so on. But most of all, it is important to determine whether, or to what extent, Christianity is true. Serious study of any movement requires evaluation as well as description and analysis. To evaluate Christianity, we must come to a reasoned judgment as to whether its distinctive claims are true or false.

There are, to be sure, other kinds of evaluation. One might believe that Christianity is false while commending, say, the influence of Christians in the abolition of slavery. Thus one may make a negative evaluation of Christianity's truth claims but a positive one of its contributions to social justice, art, or literature. Yet the evaluative process can scarcely ignore the issue of truth. For if Christian teachings are not true, then the church has, intentionally or not, deceived vast numbers of people.

Many discussions of religions operate on the premise, expressed or not, that religion really has little to do with truth in the usual sense, that its importance is rather to be found in its ritual, literary imagination, social conscience, or political influence. However that may be the case with other faiths, that premise is quite false in the case of Christianity.

Christianity comes before the world, above all, with a claim of truth—and not only "religious" truth in some vague sense. It claims to be based on historical events, events which were seen, heard, experienced. I recall a medieval history lecture at Princeton University in which the Jewish scholar Norman Cantor discussed the differences between Christianity and the various mystery religions of the first century. Why was Christianity ultimately successful, while the mystery religions eventually disappeared? Cantor noted certain similarities and differences between Christianity and the mysteries. But the foremost difference, and that which ultimately led to the success of the church, was, in Cantor's view, the fact that Christianity made a historical claim. Other faiths spoke of dying and rising gods, of salvation from the pains of this life. But Christianity identified one historical man as

God in the flesh and claimed eyewitness verification of his death and resurrection. Indeed, Christianity located this event within a well-known historical sequence, the history of Israel. There were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus.

Cantor put all his emphasis on the historical claim. But of course a historical claim in itself is somewhat irrelevant to the success of a movement. The claim must be concerned with a matter of importance, of course. And most of all, that claim must be believed: believed to be true. People do not risk their lives in the face of persecution to uphold a view they believe to be in error or only somewhat probable.

To deny that truth claim about Christ is to reject Christianity at its root and indeed to cast a shadow upon all of its supposed accomplishments in history. For all the good it has done, it is, if false, at root a deception, which the human race should best set aside.

On the other hand, if that claim is true, then even the evil done in the name of Christ takes on a different perspective. Yes, Christians have often done wrong; however, (1) that is to be expected in view of the biblical doctrine of sin, (2) Christianity has done and will do far more to alleviate evil than its wayward members have done to promote it, and (3) God will, in his own way and his own time, surely right the wrongs.

Any serious study of Christianity, therefore, will involve consideration of the Christian truth claim and the grounds for it. I confess I am amazed at the number of supposedly educated people, even scholars in the field of religion, who have learned much about Christianity but have never seriously considered the question of whether its claims are true. This book will attempt to fill that gap in their education.

CHAPTER 3

WHY IT SEEMS SO DIFFICULT TODAY TO BELIEVE IN CHRISTIANITY

Many people today have little or no inclination to believe in Christianity or any other traditional religion. They look at the whole idea of religion with a profound skepticism. I think I understand something of the skeptical mindset, for I too have something of a skeptical turn of mind. I have always made it difficult for people to persuade me of their ideas. Were I not a Christian, I would probably be a skeptic of sorts. Indeed, one step leading toward my own Christian commitment was a meta-skepticism: a skepticism about skepticism, a reluctance to be persuaded by the more fashionable forms of unbelief.

RELATIVISM

One of these is relativism, a general denial of objective truth. Relativism has been with us for centuries, at least since the Sophists of ancient Greece. Today some people call this position "postmodern," despite the ancient precedent. "Postmodern" is an honorific epithet: it's like saying that this position is newer than new. But whether new or old, it is not right.

Relativism can be found among philosophical intellectuals or among uneducated "village skeptics." But whether found among sophisticates or among the plain folks, relativism is wrong.

If there is no objective truth, then any kind of argument, analysis, or evaluation is doomed from the start. If there is no universal truth, but only "truth for me" or "truth for you," then there is no point in trying to persuade anybody of anything. If proposition A is true for me, I may want you to believe it too. But not-A may well be true for you; how can I prove it is not? And why should I try to prove A to you? For to prove it could only mean to establish its objective truth. And in this discussion, we exclude objective truth from the outset.

But that presupposition of naive relativism is either self-contradictory or unintelligible. It is self-contradictory if it claims that there is no objective truth while claiming objective truth for its own assertions. If, on the other hand, the relativist denies that even his own assertions are objectively true, then those assertions no longer assert anything. To "assert" means to claim the objective truth of a statement. It is unintelligible to talk about "asserting" something without making a claim to objective truth.

"Naive relativism" is an entirely worthless form of skepticism. That kind of relativism, if taken seriously, would keep us from believing anything at all. But of course nobody takes it seriously, least of all those who thoughtlessly advocate it. Thus it amounts to an abdication of intellectual responsibility: it boils down to a policy of believing what you want to believe and being skeptical about what you don't want to believe. That policy frees you from the responsibility of ever having to seriously examine evidence.

There is value, however, in skepticism of a less sweeping sort. That is to say that in general it is good to seek evidence when we are asked to change our beliefs in important ways. The Bible frequently offers proof—and counsels people to seek proof (see Deut 18:22; John 5:36; 10:38; 14:11; Acts 1:3; 17:11; 1 Cor 14:29; 15:1–8; 1 Thess 5:21).

We shall look at that proof in later chapters. For now I would like further to analyze the nature of present-day skepticism. For I believe there is more to it, or less, than the healthy skepticism mentioned in the above paragraph.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

We are often told that people in our time face historically unprecedented levels of difficulty in coming to religious faith. The standard account is that educated people living in the past three centuries have had to bear the peculiar burden of "coming to terms with the Enlightenment."

The Enlightenment was the period from roughly 1650–1800 in which, according to the standard account, the dominant academic and cultural leaders turned away from religious traditions and sought to build human knowledge and society upon a purely secular foundation. It was the "age of reason," and human reason was considered autonomous, free from any norms external to itself. Although the pioneers of modern science were Christian

believers, the Enlightenment sought to replace faith with science as the final test of truth.

The analysis proceeds to claim that we are today the heirs of the Enlightenment, and we have no choice in the matter. The Enlightenment forms a great historical divide. Those on this side of the divide can never go back to the unsophisticated faith typical of the ages before the 1650s.

Skeptical scholar Rudolf Bultmann argued this point in his famous 1941 essay, "The New Testament and Mythology":

> It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles.

I have never entirely understood Bultmann's argument: does using the electric light really commit us to disbelieve in miracles? But we can understand the broad thrust of his view. Bultmann wants us to believe that the Enlightenment mentality underlying the success of modern science and technology is a mentality characterized by autonomous reasoning, which attributes the ultimate rule of the world to impersonal laws, rather than to the purposes of a personal ruler.

Now in the first place, when Bultmann was writing, he was behind the times so far as science was concerned. He thought that twentieth-century scientists, like those of the eighteenth, presupposed a deterministic materialism, ignoring the twentieth-century developments of relativity and quantum mechanics.

But the force of his argument seems to be that whatever the present views of scientists, we have an obligation to follow the modern consensus, to believe what our culture presents as the modern view. But that is obviously false. The Nazi and Soviet totalitarianisms of the twentieth century had both gained popularity on the ground that they were the wave of the future, that they were the inevitable next developments. But today we regard as heroes those who resisted these ideologies.

In fact, the Enlightenment has influenced many people to disbelieve in miracles, spirits, angels, and God. But influence and proof are two different

things. In no way has this historical development disproved any of these theological beliefs.

BACK TO THE POSTMODERN

In contrast with Enlightenment skepticism, there has developed another kind of skepticism, the "postmodern" skepticism mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Enlightenment thought, which postmodernists call "modern," exalts scientific reason and technology, the tradition that brought about Bultmann's "electric light and wireless." Postmodernism questions that rationalism by a more general philosophical skepticism, at least a skepticism against "worldviews" or "metanarratives." Postmodernists accepted everyday knowledge, "little narratives," but not the sweeping generalities of philosophy or religion.

But the postmodernists were not able to draw clear lines between the little narratives and the big ones. Nor could they show why they should be exempted from their own critique: for their own skepticism of grand narratives surely seems itself to be a grand narrative, a general way to look at reality and human reasoning.

Nor did they convince very many people that large systems of knowledge amount to political conspiracies.

In fact, modernist culture, governed by science and technology, continues to dominate the contemporary world. Rationalist modernism and irrationalist postmodernism jostle back and forth for advantage in learned discussion groups. But neither has succeeded in imposing on the general public any obligation to think their way.

In the debate over Christianity, modernists claim that Christians don't have sufficient evidence and argument. Postmodernists question whether Christians have any right to claim that they know any truth at all. Some Christians are intimidated by these twin critiques. Others see the inherent weaknesses in these forms of conventional contemporary wisdom, and they push boldly beyond the intellectual status quo.

CHAPTER 4

BELIEVING AND AUTONOMY

I am asking you to consider believing in Christ. Belief in a person is trust. So I am asking you to trust Jesus. Part of trust is believing what the person says. So believing in Jesus involves believing that certain things are true: true objectively and factually, as I argued earlier. In this book, I want to offer you some reasons for believing these truths, accepting these facts.

Before I do that, it is important for me to spend just a bit of time on the general subject of believing. This is part of the study called "epistemology" or "theory of knowledge," and that can become very complicated indeed.[1] But here I just want to mention a few especially important points.

CRITERIA

"Why should I believe this?" always asks for a standard, a criterion, a norm. The word "should" refers to an obligation, something like a moral obligation. So when I try to persuade you of something, I want you to sense a kind of obligation, a moral necessity, to change your beliefs. If you sense no such obligation, then I would agree that you should reject what I am saying and go on believing as you have.

But how do we go about discovering such obligations? It is not a straightforward matter like discovering a rake in the tool shed. Obligations, oughts, and shoulds are not discovered through our senses in any obvious way. We are tempted to say that there is no objective way of determining such norms: that we must simply listen to our feelings and follow whatever principle seems right at the moment. But that is the position of postmodern relativism that we discussed earlier. And at the end of that discussion, we found it worthless.

Someone might say that, although we should reject relativism in forming our factual beliefs, we cannot help being relativistic in matters of norm, criterion, obligation. But unless there are objective criteria, there can be no

objective factual knowledge. For all knowledge involves normative beliefs, beliefs which we are obligated to affirm. However objective a fact may seem to be, for example 2 + 2 = 4, unless we sense an obligation to believe it, we may as well confess instead that 2 + 2 = 5.

How, then, do we come to objective knowledge of criteria? I won't go into details here.[2] But it seems obvious to me that such criteria are among our most basic beliefs, since they profoundly affect all our other beliefs. These criteria are part of our most fundamental views of the universe, our worldviews.

Some have believed that we should not accept any belief unless it is warranted by the evidence of our senses: sight, hearing, and so on. Sense experience is one widely accepted criterion for belief. Some have accepted it as a norm. Historically, it has been called "empiricism." And we can see that such a norm, consistently applied, will affect every belief that we have. Beliefs based on what we see and hear will be accepted; beliefs will be rejected when they deal with alleged spiritual realities, with what cannot be seen and heard. Such a norm will exclude the God of the Bible from the outset of the discussion, for he cannot be seen and heard, unless, of course, he takes the initiative to *make* himself seen and heard.

Similarly, it is common for people today to believe that science is the most reliable test of truth. Science relies on the evidence of the senses, as on the view discussed in the last paragraph. But it also uses sophisticated instruments, mathematical formulae, complicated hypotheses, and so on. Some have said they will not believe anything unless it is scientifically verifiable. And on that norm, as on the last one we discussed, the God of the Bible is excluded from consideration.

Certainly God is revealed in nature (Ps 19:1; Rom 1:18–21), but there is no set of scientific instruments that can reliably locate him and describe his nature and behavior. Moreover, the God of the Bible claims to know far more than any human scientist, for he created all things. He claims the right to contradict human theorizing. In Job 38–42, God rebukes Job and his four friends by showing them how little they know about the world, dismissing entirely the half-baked theorizing that fills most of the book.

So to adopt science as a supreme criterion of belief, as we have seen in our discussion of Bultmann in chapter 3, is to reject the God of the Bible at the outset. But are you really sure that should be done? Is it possible that that kind of scientism is a product of the old mind? Is it possible that there is a new mind that thinks God's thoughts after him, enthusiastically engaging in science, but regarding God's word, not science, as the supreme criterion of true belief?

IS AUTONOMY REALLY NECESSARY?

Some say that we ourselves are the final criterion of truth. On this view, we should listen carefully to the evidence and the arguments, but then we must make up our own minds: that is, we must decide autonomously. After the arguments, whether in science, philosophy, politics, or religion, we alone can determine what is true and right.

This position can be made to sound inevitable, obvious. Imagine that you have a vision of an angel speaking to you, demanding that you change your belief about something. You are still the one who must decide whether to believe the words of the angel. Same for the words of the Bible. Same for God himself. My beliefs must be *my* beliefs. Nobody except me can decide what my beliefs are to be. An angel, or the Bible, or God may claim authority over me, but I must decide whether to accept that authority. And that means that in the end my own authority is higher than anyone else's.

This position, like others we have discussed, would eliminate belief in the biblical God from the outset. For that God claims supreme authority over our beliefs, thoughts, and decisions. The Bible sets the "wisdom of God" over against the "wisdom of the world" (1 Cor 1–3), and it says that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps 111:10). The beginning of wisdom, and of knowledge too (Prov 1:7).

The following statement is profoundly at odds with our old-mind culture that proudly defends its autonomy, but it is the teaching of Scripture: God claims a totalitarian authority over the human intellect. And, if this God really exists, that claim is eminently reasonable. God made the world, he made the human mind, and he devised the connections between them. Only he has ultimate knowledge of what we should believe.

So there is a radical opposition, an antithesis, between divine authority and intellectual autonomy. To believe in one you must forsake the other. Deciding between the two has radical implications. If you move from one to the other, all of life will be different. You will have a new mind.

But the position of intellectual autonomy seemed so obvious! How can we even think of abandoning it? Rejecting your own autonomy seems like trying to step out of your own skin. It seems impossible—almost logically impossible. Is there any way to defend an alternative to autonomy? Let me try.

First, I concede that we cannot avoid believing what we believe. Putting the issue in that tautological way helps us to see why autonomy seems so obviously true. But tautologies are notoriously uninformative. I tell you nothing about the recent election if I tell you that the winners won. Nor is it an adequate weather forecast to predict that either it will rain or it will not. Similarly, when someone says that we must believe what we believe, he says nothing about what specific things we should believe, or for what reasons.

At this point, the dialogue between divine authority and autonomy looks like this. God claims to know what we should believe and on what grounds. The autonomous thinker opposes that claim. But what does he put in its place? Does autonomy require us to believe the first thing that pops into our heads? If so, it is certainly intellectually bankrupt. Or does it allow us to critically examine our ideas, to try to find better ones? If the latter, what criteria do we use for this critical analysis? The first ones that pop into our head? But that would be irrational.

Surely at some point even the autonomous thinker must look beyond his own mind. He needs data from beyond himself to form opinions about the world. And he must often seek criteria from people more knowledgeable than himself. All of us, in that limited way, must have some recourse to authority, if only human authority. Perhaps as a child I believed the moon was made of green cheese. I learned otherwise from my school teachers. But I would not have learned from them unless I had, in one sense, valued their opinions more than my own.

At each stage of learning, of course, we make up our own minds; that is obvious. But we don't always find adequate evidence or criteria within our

own heads. Often we must look outside ourselves. A reasonable person will seek the best help available. If God exists, and if his help is available, then that help is unquestionably the best. His ideas are superior to any of our own. Indeed, we ought to give them precedence over any of our own views.

We make the decision to accept this divine authority. But if we don't accept it, we have, granted God's existence, decided very unwisely. It is always unwise to reject the counsel of the world's creator.

There is nothing, therefore, about our power to make free decisions that prevents us from deciding to accept God's authority. Granted his existence, the decision is a "no-brainer," an obvious choice.

CHAPTER 5

BELIEVING SOMETHING FOR A REASON

Any time we discuss important beliefs, our minds turn to the reasons for those beliefs. It seems a very deep commitment of human nature to ask why we should believe something. So now I am asking you to consider believing in the God of the Bible, and, if you have any interest at all, you want to know why. What is the reason why we should believe in God?

I shall give you some reasons as the book progresses. For now, I would like to continue our discussion of epistemology from chapter 4 and discuss what it means for us to believe something for a reason.

We believe many things without reasons, or at least without being able to give reasons. A four-year-old may come to believe that the kitchen stove is often too hot to touch. Most of us would say that such a belief is knowledge, not mere belief. That is, the child has the right to believe as he does. But most likely he will not be able to give you a reason for that belief.

Even in adulthood, we have many beliefs for which most of us could not give reasons. Sometimes our inability arises from the fact that there are too many reasons. I believe that my wife loves me, but there are so many reasons for believing that, I couldn't begin to enumerate them.

But sometimes we believe things without being able to formulate even one reason for believing them. For example, I believe that the earth is more than five minutes old. Now there are reasons for believing this if we make certain assumptions, such as the reliability of our memory. But it is impossible to *prove* that memory is reliable. Judges and lawyers know that witnesses often substitute fantasy for fact. It is at least possible that such fantasizing constitutes the majority, or the totality, of what we think we remember.

I am not, of course, suggesting that we treat our memories as fantasies. Common sense tells us that we should at least act *as if* our memories are reliable. This is a practical decision, enabling us to live in the world. But

common sense is not proof. There is no evidence or argument that can *prove* that memory is reliable and therefore that the world is more than five minutes old. You might say that a coin in your pocket dated 1983 proves that the world dates back at least to 1983. But that assumes that the coin really was minted in 1983, rather than just bearing that number. There is no argument, no reasoning, that can prove the age of the coin, or the world, or ourselves.

Same for the common beliefs that (1) other people have minds like mine, (2) the future will be like the past and present, (3) my senses tell me what actually exists outside my mind. We cannot prove any of these, but we usually believe them on the basis of common sense. We believe them, and most would say we know them. But we do not believe them on the basis of evidence or argument.[1]

Even when we do believe something for a reason, that reason often turns out to be highly complicated. I believe that Tallahassee is the capital of Florida, because I read it somewhere—perhaps first in a school geography text. But why do I trust school geography texts? They have sometimes included errors. I suppose I believe them because other people do. But I must qualify that. I believe them because *people I trust* believe them. But why do I trust the people I trust? That question opens up the whole history of my upbringing, my ethnicity and religion, the values of my parents and others, the reinforcement of those values by people's kindness and reliability, and so on.

Ultimately, it is that kind of a web of trust that underlies all beliefs, including beliefs about what constitutes common sense. It is not as if each of us had a collection of beliefs, B1, B2, B3 … and each had a reason attached, R1, R2, R3. Rather, we verify candidates for belief by our whole web of beliefs,[2] which is also a web of trust.

Sometimes it is not too difficult to bring a new belief into the web. I once went to the Florida Department of Motor Vehicles, turned in my license that expired in 2013, and received a new license that expired in 2021. Before I went, I believed that my driver's license expired in 2013. After my visit, I abandoned that belief and substituted for it the belief that my license would expire in 2021.

But sometimes, a new belief will force you to make complicated adjustments to your web. When you reach the end of a mystery novel and

discover that the bank teller was the murderer, that may force you to reconsider your beliefs that the bookmaker was evil, that the pianist knew nothing of the plot, that the clergyman was virtuous.

When you change from disbelief in God to belief, the change is quite disruptive. Your moral beliefs, obviously, may need to change, as well as your beliefs about science and art. You may find that people you trusted before are not worthy of trust, and vice versa. You may find yourself hating music you used to like, and vice versa.

So when we talk about reasons for believing in God, those reasons may turn out to be very complicated and very deep. The incredible beauty of a sunset, of Bach or Handel, the reprehensibility of abortion, the deep love of a Christian grandmother, all of these may be part of the reason. None may be persuasive by itself. But each may form a broad picture that is irresistible—a way of thinking that suddenly looks and feels right. Everything becomes new.

As the apostle Paul said, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17). The "new" is what I have been calling a new mind, what Paul calls "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16).

CHAPTER 6

BELIEVING, WILLING, FEELING

In the preceding chapter I spoke of a broad picture that is irresistible—a way of thinking that suddenly looks and feels right. I think that's what it is like when you come to believe in God. But someone might take issue with the phrase "feels right." Some might object that such a concept compromises with the subjectivism of our age, the notion that you can believe whatever you feel like believing.

Such subjectivism is not consistent with my emphasis through the first five chapters on Christianity's truth claim. As you recall, I have no sympathy with postmodernism, or with any of the more global skepticisms that have appeared in the history of thought.

Now many people like me, who think that objective truth is important, express this conviction in terms of the classic distinction between intellect, will, and emotions or feelings. On this view, it is the intellect that knows, the will that decides, and the feelings that, well, feel. According to Plato and others, it is important that the intellect, not the will or the feelings, should direct the course of our lives. Indeed, the other faculties ought to be subservient to the intellect, so that the intellect governs what the will decides and the emotions feel.

I think we all understand what dynamic Plato refers to here. Often it does seem as though these three faculties are in conflict. Sometimes we make choices that in retrospect even we agree to have been stupid; so we admit that we should have subordinated will to intellect. And of course teenagers in love proverbially get into trouble by following their feelings rather than what they know to be true.

But there is something wrong with this picture. We know, certainly, that intellect, will, and emotions are not little entities fighting among themselves up in our heads, as in the Pixar film *Inside Out*. And in the final analysis, it is not the intellect that knows, but the person. Similarly, it is the person who

chooses and the person who feels. "Intellect" is not the name for a physical organ so far undiscovered by medical science. It is just a name for something we do, our thinking. The intellect is the person's thinking, the will his choosing, and the emotions his feeling.

So it is not as if each of these came to a conclusion independently and then tried to persuade (or intimidate, or coax, or cajole) the others to go along. Nor do these faculties compete to impress their own individual or collective views on the person. Rather, the three influence one another all the time. Our thinking of course influences our willing and our feeling. We would like to believe that our choices are based on the truth, and that what we feel about something is appropriate to what that thing really is. But it's also the case that our choices and feelings influence what we believe to be true. If I choose to root for the Pittsburgh Pirates, that choice will make it easier for me to believe good things about the Pirates and bad things about their opponents. So my will affects my intellect. And if I have a warm affection for the Pirates, that emotion will also affect my beliefs and my choices.

To use a more serious example, the apostle Paul in Romans 1:19–20 says that God is clearly revealed in the world he has made:

> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

But in verse 18 he says that sinners "by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." These pagan unbelievers, Paul says, have plenty of evidence for God, and in a sense they even "know" God (verse 21). But they refuse to believe, suppressing the truth (verse 18), refusing to honor God (verse 21), exchanging God's glory for idols (verses 23, 25). They "did not see fit to acknowledge God" (verse 28). Clearly this is a description of people who *choose* not to *believe*. Their choices have determined their beliefs.

Of course, that is also true in the positive alternative, when people come to believe in God. That too is a choice. It is a choice *not* to suppress the truth, refuse to honor God, exchange God's glory for idols. It is a choice *to* acknowledge God.

In the case of Eve, the mother of us all, her *feelings* led her to believe that God's word was wrong:

> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. (Gen 3:6)

The point is not, however, that Eve's depraved feelings should have yielded to her pure intellect. In this narrative, it is her *person*, everything she is, that turns away from God. Scripture never says that the will and feelings are more sinful than the intellect. Rather, when we turn away from God, every bit of us is sinful (Gen 6:5).

To some extent, then, we choose what to believe, and we believe what we feel like believing. The point is not to make the intellect rule over the will and emotions, but to make ourselves (and therefore every part of us) follow God's word.

In chapter 5 I argued that belief is often a complicated adjustment to our "web" of commitment. Here, my point is that beliefs, choices, and feelings are also a web in which each is dependent on the others and on the whole. A change in beliefs can be described as (1) a new intellectual insight, (2) a choice to believe something new, (3) or feeling that a new belief is more satisfying. These three descriptions are perspectival. That is, they are three perspectives on what happens. Any change in our belief can be described in any of these three ways. Whenever we adopt a new belief, all these things happen.

So as I said in chapter 5, when you come to believe in God, you come to a way of thinking that feels right. It is also an intellectual event, and also something you choose to do. But it is also a feeling. A counselor friend of mine rebukes his clients when they say they "feel" something is true. He says they should instead talk of "thinking" something is true. But in our common discourse, many people use "feel" as a synonym for "think." That sounds awkward to me, but unlike my counselor friend I cannot say it is actually wrong. A change in conviction usually coincides with a change in feeling.

Having taught students for 45 years, I've often asked what it is like to learn something new, or to accept a new viewpoint. That is not easy to

describe. Consider Charlie, who is wrestling with the question of whether divorce can be a moral choice. He needs to come up with a good case on one side or another for a term paper he is writing. Charlie may go back and forth for a time between two positions. He will read a good book that justifies divorce, then another book that condemns it. He will be persuaded for a while by one argument, then by a contrary argument. He will think one Bible verse settles the question, then another, then none. Back and forth, back and forth. Then something mysterious happens. Conviction jells, amazingly, a couple days before the term paper is due.

There may be a simple explanation for this dawning of conviction. Perhaps Charlie has discovered a new argument that he hadn't considered before, that settles everything in his mind. But maybe not. Perhaps he knew all the arguments before he even began the study. But perhaps in the couple days preceding the deadline one argument that hadn't seemed cogent before suddenly began to control Charlie's thinking. One argument became more "weighty," as we say. But the process by which one argument becomes more weighty in someone's mind is very mysterious.

It has happened to me often. Of course I believe that behind all the processes and causes is God's providence. But I can rarely identify those processes; they are hidden to me. But I know what it is like. It is like a feeling: a feeling of satisfaction or contentment. It is a feeling that says I can end my quest for now. I have a sufficient level of certainty. I have a conviction, and I feel that I can argue it with my readers.

In my past writings, I've given a name to that feeling: cognitive rest.[1] It's like finishing a task and being able to go on to something else.

In that way I defend my statement of chapter 5 that believing in God is "a way of thinking that suddenly looks and feels right." That is my goal in this book. I want you to come to cognitive rest in trusting the biblical God, the gospel, and Jesus Christ.

That right feeling is what turns conviction into worship. I don't want you to believe in God grudgingly, whatever that might mean. I want you to believe in him joyfully, thankfully. I want you to hate what is evil and love what is good.[2] That's all part of belief in God, as the Bible presents it.

CHAPTER 7

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE BIBLICAL GOD

So far we have been talking about believing. Now we must consider what I am asking you to believe in. We may summarize by saying that I am recommending "belief in God," though as we'll see I am also asking you to believe in a story that God is involved in.

We might think that we can divide all human beings into two groups: those who believe in God and those who do not. Often in dorm room conversations one student will ask another "do you believe in God?" and receive a simple yes or no.

But that way of thinking obscures the vast complication of the question. For "God" means many things to many people. There is the highest Hindu god, Brahma, who resides far from the realm of human thought, beyond light and darkness, beyond good and evil. There is Zeus, the king of the Greek gods, who gets jealous, angry, commits adultery, tosses lightning bolts at people. There is Aristotle's Prime Mover, the first cause of everything, who nevertheless does not know or love anything on the earth. There is the god of pantheists like Plotinus, Spinoza, and Hegel, who is identical to the world and the world to him. And there is the god of deists like Lord Herbert of Cherbury and John Toland, who think that God made the world, made it run according to natural laws, and then never interfered with it again. To some, God is a benevolent grandfather figure, or grandmother, whose love excludes any kind of punishment or discipline. To some, God is a blessing dispenser, one who gives people everything they want as long as they pray with enough faith. To still others, God is a cosmic policeman, who sits ready to pounce on anyone who makes a moral mistake.

Then there are the gods of the amateur theologians, the ones who say "yes, I believe in God," and immediately follow that with, "my God is like this," or "my God would never do that." But how do they know? And why should any of us regard them as experts?

Clearly, it is not the case that all these "gods" are different names of one being. These "gods" are vastly different. And we can similarly dismiss the common comment that "under the surface all religions are one." Worshiping Aristotle's Prime Mover is clearly different from worshiping Baal or Aphrodite.

But I'm asking you to believe in none of these, only the God of the Bible. The Bible's concept of God is unique. Let me summarize that concept in the following sections.

THE CREATOR-CREATURE DISTINCTION

The very first verse of the Bible, Genesis 1:1, tells us that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the Bible frequently emphasizes that God is very different from his creations. He is eternal; they are temporal. He is omniscient; their knowledge is limited. He is omnipotent; they are comparatively weak. But in each of these respects he is *different*. He is God, and we are not. He owns the world, and we do not. He establishes the rules for the world, and we are expected to follow them.

So the mind of God is different from any creaturely mind—not just that he knows more than we, but that he knows in a different way. He is the ultimate criterion of knowledge. He governs all the things we know, etc. So his strength is different from our strength, his wisdom from our wisdom, his justice from our justice, his love from our love.

One way to describe the root of sin is to say that it is renouncing the creator-creature distinction. The sinner does not want to acknowledge God's control over the world, his right to issue commands, his presence throughout his own territory. Satan, and therefore his human followers, would like to replace God on the throne, to be God themselves.

ABSOLUTE PERSONALITY

Another unique characteristic of the biblical God is his absolute personality. "Absolute" means something like "supreme," but it includes ideas like omnipresence and omniscience. God's absoluteness includes the biblical teaching that God has no needs (Acts 17:25), that all the conditions of his existence and continued existence are within himself. So nobody can threaten

or endanger God's existence. Satan's project of replacing God on the throne is the utmost foolishness.

But the biblical God is also *personal*. In many philosophies and religions, the more absolute a being is, the more abstract and impersonal he (it) is. But in the Bible God's absoluteness and personality reinforce one another.

The idea of an absolute-personal God is unique to the Bible. Other religions and philosophies recognize supreme beings that are impersonal (the Hindu Brahma, the Buddhist Nirvana, the "fate" of the old Greek religion, Plato's Form of the Good, Aristotle's Prime Mover, Spinoza's "God or Nature," Hegel's Absolute). And some religions call us to worship personal beings that are not absolute, as in the polytheisms of Egypt, Babylon, Canaan, Greece, Rome, Germany, and Scandinavia. Of course, Judaism and Islam do approach the biblical view of God as a personal absolute; but that is because they are themselves deeply influenced by the Bible, though they depart from it in many ways. The same can be said of some cults and sects that originate in Christianity, like the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The God of the Bible, therefore, has sufficient power to meet all our needs, but he is also able to speak to us: to tell us who he is, to tell us his will, and to express his love. In the Bible, the idols of the nations are dumb, speechless (Hab 2:18–19; 1 Cor 12:2). So our relationship with God is fully personal.

Indeed, it is more than that. It is *tri*-personal. The biblical God is one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So God is himself a society, before he even creates any other personal beings like the angels and ourselves. God's social nature does not depend on his creating social partners. Rather, when he befriends creatures, they enter into an incredibly rich and blessed society that has always existed beyond our horizons. This doctrine, the Trinity, is very mysterious and difficult to formulate. We learn it best when we come to trust God through the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

GOD, THE LORD

The name by which God most commonly identifies himself in Scripture is the name *Lord*. This term represents originally the Hebrew name *Yahweh* (Exod

3:14–15) that God revealed to Moses. In time, the Jews decided that *Yahweh* was too holy to be pronounced, so they substituted for it *Adonai*, "Lord" (and its Greek equivalent, *Kurios*). English translators use *Lord* to render all these terms, *Yahweh*, *Adonai*, and *Kurios*. The term *Lord*, then, is found over 7,000 times in the English Bible, most often referring to God, and regularly (in the New Testament) referring to Christ.

My studies in the usage of this term[1] have concluded that Scripture connects God's lordship especially with three other concepts: (1) *Control*: the lord is the one who controls all aspects of every situation, by his absolute power. (2) *Authority*: the lord has the right to be obeyed whenever he issues a command. (3) *Presence*: the lord enters into an intimate relationship with the things and people he has made, dwelling with them wherever they are (Ps 139). Particularly, he enters into covenants with people and nations in which he commits himself to them, saying "I will be your God, and you shall be my people" (cf. Exod 6:7; Deut 4:20; 7:6; 2 Cor 6:16; Rev 21:3). In this relationship, he often comes to be literally present with his people, in the tabernacle, the temple, and the person of Christ (John 1:14).

So when I discuss reasons for believing in God, they will be reasons for believing in *this* God, not some other.

CHAPTER 8

WHY BELIEVE IN GOD?

We saw that according to Romans 1:19–20 God is *clearly* revealed in the created world. So everybody knows that God exists, and they know quite a bit about him as well ("his eternal power and divine nature," verse 20). And it's not only that they know some things *about* God; they know *him* (verse 21, "for although they knew God …"). So their knowledge of God is not only a knowledge of facts; it is knowledge of a person, as friends know friends and enemies know enemies.

So evidently it is not hard to believe in God, regardless of what people say (see chapter 3). Certainly it is not difficult from God's side. God can and does make himself clearly seen.

So the problem of unbelief is not ignorance, but rebellion, suppression of the truth (Rom 1:18). People don't need reasons for believing in God, for at some level of their consciousness they already believe in him.

But how can that belief be brought to the surface? To put it better, how can the knowledge of an enemy become the knowledge of a friend? Those are the difficult questions. Unbelief is persistent and deep, often highly skilled at finding arguments to repress the knowledge of God. Indeed, the dirty secret of Christian apologetics is this: there is no human argument that is guaranteed to overcome unbelief.

But people do sometimes turn from unbelief to belief in God. Essentially this is a supernatural event, an intervention by the Holy Spirit (John 6:44; Acts 13:48; 16:14; Eph 2:8–10). But God is sometimes pleased to use human witness, and that witness, directed against unbelief, inevitably has argumentative force. So although there is no human argument guaranteed to overcome unbelief in every case, God does *sometime*s make use of *some* arguments in bringing about conversion.

Of course, he may (and sometimes does!) make use of arguments generally rated as very bad ones. We cannot evaluate apologetic arguments

by determining in advance what God is likely to do with them. But we can look to find arguments that are biblically right.

There are many arguments for God's existence that are both valid (following the rules of logic) and sound (employing true premises). Consider:

If the Bible is God's word, then what it teaches is true.

The Bible is God's word.

The Bible teaches that God exists.

Therefore God exists.

This is a perfectly valid and sound argument for the existence of God. The two premises are both true, and together they validly imply the conclusion, that God exists. But wise Christians would not expect a non-Christian inquirer to be persuaded by this argument. Something is missing.

What is missing is *persuasion*. A good argument must be persuasive, as well as valid and sound.[1] That reminds us of the complications of the apologetic task. The argument above is persuasive to me, but it would not be persuasive to many non-Christian inquirers. That implies that what persuades one person will not persuade another. Arguments are what philosopher George Mavrodes called *person-variable*.

I mentioned this fact in chapter 5, where we discussed the "web of belief." Most likely unbelief in God will not be overturned with a single syllogism, but only as part of a disruptive shift of the whole web of unbelief. This is one major reason why arguments which I find persuasive may not feel that way to you. Because belief in God presupposes and generates a new web of belief, a new pattern in which to place the data of experience, a new way of thinking about everything, a new mind.

CHAPTER 9

RIGHT, WRONG, AND GOD

The most disruptive topic I know, alongside of religion itself, is morality. No praise brings greater pride than moral praise, and no criticism brings greater resentment, shame, or anger than moral criticism.

If the biblical God exists, there is certainly a close relation between him and the moral order. We have seen how Paul in Romans 1 points out the obviousness, the clear revelation, of God's existence and nature. He emphasizes, however, that people "suppress" this truth. How could they do that, when God is so clearly known? Through moral rebellion. It is "by their unrighteousness" that they suppress the truth (verse 18). Paul first describes that unrighteousness in their religion: they are idolaters (verses 21–23). And that worship of false gods leads to what we more commonly describe as immorality: sexual immorality (verses 24–27), and then all the other kinds of immorality as well (verses 28–32). In Paul's view, rejection of God leads to moral degradation.

Christians see the same pattern in post-biblical history. As Rome engaged in polytheistic worship, its people became addicted to government corruption, cruel games, destruction of infants, and sexual perversions. Other great empires followed the same pattern. Later came the history of the United States of America. Founded by Christians seeking to worship according to their conscience, organized to maximize personal liberty, bounded by principles of biblical law, one might have hoped that this nation would have avoided the moral corruption of other societies. But Paul's argument in Romans 1–3 accuses all people of sin, even those who profess true religion. So as Americans gradually freed themselves of the religious convictions that governed the first colonists, they loosened the moral bonds as well. Today, like ancient Rome, America has lost its moral standing in the world. Degraded sex dominates its entertainment culture. Illegitimacy and broken families have led to a criminal culture among the young. The electorate

seems determined to perpetuate this, accepting in compensation an ever-increasing banquet of free government services.

Indeed, it is evident that moral corruption, with its solution, is the main topic of the Bible. After the creation narrative, Scripture (Gen 3) describes the fall of Adam and Eve, which Paul in Romans 5:12–21 identifies as the source of the sin that indwells all of us. That is the sin for which Jesus Christ came to die.

But my argument is not that "historically denying God has led to cultural decay, therefore God exists." It is not easy to convince non-Christians that Rome fell because of its unbelief, or that America was ever a Christian nation, or that the present cultural situation is the direct result of religious change. That rejection of God leads to moral decay is easy for Christians to believe, but it seems very easy for non-Christians to dismiss. Rather, I would argue the connection between God and morality in a different way.

Morality is based on a sense of "oughtness," of obligation. Where does that come from? Of course, our parents and other caregivers play a major role in stimulating it. Your mother tells you that you really ought to clean up the mess after you spill your bowl of cereal on the floor. You may resent that; you may find ways to evade that demand. But eventually you feel the oughtness yourself. You will likely say the same thing as your mother, perhaps to your own children, when they make the same kind of mess.

But I was a philosopher child. I asked "why." Why should I obey my parents? Why should I obey my dad, rather than the nice man across the street? Why does the fact that I made a mess obligate me to clean it up? Can't we just live with messes? At least for a while? Why should I be expected to create neatness, when I don't even appreciate it much?

The immediate answers to such questions come from authorities at somewhat higher levels. If you don't clean the floor, the neighbors will be offended. They will think we live like pigs. Beyond them was "society" in some general sense. And people who wrote in newspapers the prevailing standards of etiquette. But I never felt any obligation to satisfy the standards of such people.

When I majored in philosophy in college, therefore, I was very interested in what learned people thought was the basis of morality. I learned that there

were three main traditions. The *deontological* school (Kant, H. A. Prichard) believes that we were subject to objective duties such that violating them would be logically contradictory. If you think, for instance, that it's right to break a promise, then you're endorsing the *idea* of a promise (making a pledge that may not be broken) and at the same time denying it, by thinking you may break it when you wish. But that argument is not difficult to evade. One can respond that it might not be such a bad thing to eliminate promises from our society. And if there is no such thing as a promise, that eliminates the contradiction.

The *teleological* tradition (Epicurus, John Stuart Mill) suggests a second basis for morality. They take it as self-evident that everybody seeks happiness. So we should do whatever makes us most happy. Some add to that the principle that we should seek to maximize the happiness of others as well. But that addition seems gratuitous. It would be a nicer world if everyone sought the greatest happiness for the greatest number; but are we really *obligated* to seek that? For that matter, what is the argument for saying that we *ought* to seek our own happiness? Because we do that naturally? Not everybody does. Some sacrifice their lives for others, and some have seen that as a moral good. And even if we did naturally seek our own happiness, what makes that a *moral* obligation? We naturally seek the best tasting food. But it would be hard to argue that seeking the best-tasting food is a *moral* obligation. So, despite the deontological and teleological arguments, the *ought* remains a mystery.

The third tradition is sometimes called *existentialist*, or simply *subjectivist* (Protagoras, Sartre). It amounts to doing what you really feel like doing. That seems to be where the other two traditions end up, because they cannot come up with a justification of oughtness other than personal feeling. But that is to say that there really is no basis for telling someone else "you ought to clean up your mess." If he feels like making messes, he has the right to do so.

But the *ought* is not so easily put to rest. In time even philosophical children feel obligations. Feeling an obligation is more than just feeling a feeling. Obligation is part of the world of right and wrong. If someone steals a woman's purse and beats her to death, we say that he has done wrong. It is not just that we have a negative feeling about it, as when we see ketchup

spilled on a pavement. The ketchup may have gotten there by accident. But a beating is by its very nature intentional, and therefore objectively wrong.

So we continue to ask the basis of objective morality. Might there be some kind of mysterious structure in the world that makes right things right and wrong things wrong? People sometimes say that moral laws are like physical laws: they are just there. Just as what goes up must come down, so someone who betrays another person violates a moral norm. But that is not persuasive. In physics, what goes up *does* come down. There is no "ought" about it. A ball doesn't decide whether to come down or not when you throw it into the air. It follows the law of gravitation, but that law is not a moral law.

David Hume, and later G. E. Moore, said that you may not derive statements of obligation ("ought") from mere statements of fact ("is"). The proposition that making messes is unpleasant, a statement of fact, does not imply that you ought not to make messes, a statement of obligation. Hume's argument has been challenged and refined since his time, but most people share the basic intuition behind it. Obligation is something very distinctive. You can't see it, hear it, or taste it. There is no scientific instrument that will detect it. People learned in science, philosophy, or history do not necessarily understand moral obligation any more than ordinary folks. But very often we know it is there.

Where, then, does our sense of right and wrong come from? In our experience, it comes from parents, teachers, coaches, pastors, social commentators, and so on. We sort out in our minds who to believe and who not to believe. But how do we decide this? The process is very personal. It has to do with loyalty and love. People earn the right to define right and wrong for me by loving me and by engaging my loyalty. When someone loves me and engages my loyalty, I join their side. I learn to do what pleases them. And I come to embrace a morality that reinforces that loyalty and that love. This is the "web of trust" I spoke of in chapter 5.

But human love and loyalty are not enough. What if someone you love becomes brutal, cruel, even murderous? It does happen. When that happens, we realize that the source of morality is greater than our family, our clan, even our church. Greater than our present loyalty, but not greater than loyalty itself. Morality is grounded in a higher loyalty, and a higher love. It is

grounded in a greater family, headed by someone who can never become a monster.

That is, morality depends on God. Now one can resist this conclusion. But to resist this conclusion is to resist any possibility of objective morality. The choice is yours.

But to reject morality looks more like rebellion, "suppression of the truth" (Rom 1:18), than like any kind of rational analysis.

CHAPTER 10

RIGHT, WRONG, AND BELIEVING

In chapters 5 and 6 I indicated that the reasons for which we believe things are holistic (depending on the whole complex of other beliefs we have) and person-variable (since we all have different complexes of belief, we differ as to what constitutes a good reason for believing something). I also mentioned the "web of trust," communities of love and loyalty that constrain our beliefs. That is also the case with the moral argument for God that I formulated in the previous chapter.

The argument depends on an intuition that moral obligation depends on personal love and loyalty. That intuition seems obvious to me, especially after I have given some attention to considering the alternatives. But some have not acknowledged that intuition. For them my intuition does not fit well into their existing complex of beliefs. So what seems like a good argument to me may not seem that way to someone else.

For me, to resist this intuition is a way of "suppressing the truth" (Rom 1:18). The intuition is part of the clarity of God's revelation (verses 19–21). To reject it leads to all the moral corruption described later in Romans 1, and it leaves sinners without excuse when they come before God on judgment day. But our minds may be so cluttered with ideas that conflict with this intuition, there may be a sense in which we *cannot* accept this moral intuition. Only a supernatural act of God can correct this situation: that is what I have been calling the creation of a new mind.

The new mind will see the right as right and the wrong as wrong. It will be disgusted at the corruption of human beings and societies, as Paul in Romans 1. And it will understand that holiness and righteousness come from acknowledging God's love and becoming loyal to him. It will be moved not by a proud claim to autonomy (chapter 4), but by a new web of trust including God himself in his revelation and the community of the church that has preserved and taught that revelation over the centuries.

The new mind, motivated by the new web of trust, will influence us to reject many of our old beliefs and accept many new ones. In chapter 4 and elsewhere I have used the moral "ought" and "should" to refer not only to human actions, but also to beliefs. Just as there are acts we should and should not do, so there are things that we should and should not believe.

We can all think of some obvious examples. When someone believes that people are inferior because of the color of their skin, we don't hesitate to say that their belief is false, and also, more than that, that it is morally wrong. We *ought* not to believe that. It seems to us that such a belief can only be motivated by irrational hatred, and we ought to reject beliefs that express such hate. But that implies that the opposite belief, that the worth of a person does *not* come from the color of his skin, is a belief we *ought* to hold, a belief we are morally obligated to hold.

But the principle holds more broadly than such examples might suggest. In general, we ought to believe what is true and avoid believing what is false. This does not imply that every false belief is a moral transgression. A four-year-old child is not morally required to believe that the moon revolves around the earth. Some false beliefs can be easily excused. But it is interesting that even in such cases we tend to think an excuse is needed. Excuses themselves are part of the vocabulary of morality. That there are such things as excusable falsehoods is one thing that joins belief to morality, epistemology to ethics.

So there are some things we ought to believe, other things we should not believe. If, as I argued in chapter 9, God is the source of right and wrong, then we ought first of all to believe in God.

So ethics provides a reason to believe in God, that is, it provides evidence for God. But much more: it tells us that without God ethics, and therefore reasoning, is impossible. As some would put it, ethics and reasoning *presuppose* God.

This means that even when someone argues against the existence of God, he is presupposing God's existence. Cornelius Van Til illustrated this point by recalling a man on a train whose little daughter was angrily slapping his face over and over again with all her might, even though all the while he was

supporting her on his lap. The sinner is like that, Van Til said: he couldn't argue against God unless God were sustaining him.

CHAPTER 11

EVERYTHING IS EVIDENCE FOR GOD

I said that ethics provides evidence for God. Is there any other evidence? To ask this question is to miss the point of the last couple chapters, so let me try again.

Bertrand Russell was an atheist and a philosopher. Someone asked him what he would say if he met God after death and God asked, "Why did you not believe in me?" Russell answered, "Not enough evidence."

I do think a lot of people feel that way. God, if he exists, is invisible, so you can't just go somewhere and discover him. But the trouble here is that the inquirers are pre-committed to a certain method: searching for God the way they might search for a new invertebrate, or a new asteroid, or a new law of nature. God will not be found this way; in fact, he resists being found this way. He is a personal being, and so he takes the initiative in revealing himself. And therefore, certainly, he will not let people find him by methods that presuppose their own autonomy.

But the new mind renounces any claim to autonomy. And the result is that the new mind finds God everywhere. In Romans 1:19–20, Paul says that God is clearly revealed in the entire world that he has made. That includes, well, sea slugs.

How is that? Well, if we observe sea slugs, we will have to do it God's way. Our goal is to believe about that animal what we *ought* to believe. In that oughtness we already perceive God. What we ought to believe is what God wants us to believe.

That should be enough. But as the new mind studies the sea slug in the context of its web of trust, it will drive him to wonder at God's wisdom (Ps 104:24). God deprives the sea slug of the shell that protects snails, which are otherwise very similar. But he gives some slugs exquisitely beautiful coloring. Truly the slug is evidence of the wisdom of God's creation.

My friend Vern Poythress, in his *Redeeming Science*,[1] argues that scientists *must* believe in God, because scientific laws, by their very definition, bear divine attributes. Scientific laws are omnipotent and universal,[2] personal in character (that is, rational and communicable in language),[3] incomprehensible,[4] good,[5] beautiful,[6] just,[7] even Trinitarian, in a sense.[8]

So the evidence for God in the world, viewed of course by the new mind (how else?) is vast and deep. Nothing is excluded. Paul is right to say that God is "clearly" revealed in the creation.

Some have taught that the connection between cause and effect is a special proof of God's existence. The argument is that the chain of causes must end somewhere, not go on indefinitely; for if it goes on indefinitely, then you never find a true and complete cause. It must either have no end, or it must double back on itself, or it must be an irrational fact of some sort.

Causality indeed reveals God's wisdom, as the new mind can see. But if one tries to understand causality with an old mind, a mind that presupposes human autonomy, it is certain that the causal chain *cannot* end in God. For if it ends in God, that is the end of human autonomy. That is to say, we cannot approach causality thinking that we can understand it without God and then derive God's existence from it. Rather, causality already presupposes God, or it is not a meaningful concept.

Some have said that if you presuppose God, evidence becomes meaningless, because you believe in him before considering evidence. In fact, when you do *not* presuppose God, that is when all evidence (whether for God or anything else) becomes meaningless. If you do presuppose God, then you live in a world where you are overwhelmed with evidence.

EVIL

But some believe that there is overwhelming evidence *against* the existence of God. That evidence comes from the undeniable presence, indeed the intolerable weight of evil in the world. It seems that if morality requires God, immorality disproves him, leaving us in an evidential standoff.

The argument against God is this: If God is good, he wants to eliminate evil. If he is all powerful, he is able to eliminate evil. But evil exists. So

there is no good, all-powerful God.

Defenders of Christianity ("apologists") have not neglected this argument. There are maybe nine or ten standard rebuttals to it.[9] What is most helpful to me, however, is to see how the Bible itself deals with this argument. For this problem is not something unique to "modern man." Evil has been around since the fall, and the ancients were as troubled about it as we are. Indeed, we can say that the main story of the Bible is precisely about evil: its coming into the world, God's remedy, and the success of that remedy.

The Bible mainly offers us three responses to evil. All three demand that we look at the situation with the new mind, the mind of Christ.

The first arises from the pain of Job. Reduced to utter misery by divine torment, he cries out for an interview with God (Job 23:1–7; 31:35–37). He plans to ask God a number of questions. But when God grants the interview, Job is reduced to silence. God is the one who asks the questions, and Job does not know the answers (38:3). As the dialogue develops, Job doesn't even understand much about the earth's weather and the animals. How can Job presume to understand the hand of God in relation to evil? In the end, Job says, "I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:6). So Paul, as he agonizes over the unbelief of his fellow Israelites, recognizes his incompetence to bring accusations against God: "But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?' " (Rom 9:20)

What both Job and Paul come to see is that God is by his very nature beyond criticism. He is the lord, the controller of all, and his authority governs the thinking and words of all his creatures (recall our discussion in chapter 7).

So God takes an authoritarian stance. Distasteful as that may be to modern old-mind thinkers, it makes perfect sense. God *is* the supreme authority, and he has the *right* to do what he wishes with his creation. As we shall see, what he does is always right. But we are not qualified to assess what he does. Rather, we should always assume, as Job did, and Paul, that there is always something in God's providence that we don't understand; and

if we understood it fully, we would see that it vindicates God's goodness and power.

The second response of Scripture to the presence of evil is sometimes called the "greater good defense." In Romans 8:35, Paul speaks of the "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword" that Christians of his day (including Paul himself) were enduring. But none of these, he says, can separate them from the love of Christ (verse 39). In that context, he presents the divine promise that "for those who love God, all things work together for good" (verse 28). One day we shall look back on the evils we have experienced, and we will see them as God's pathway to a greater good.

The third response is that God will transform our hearts so that we shall no longer see evil as a problem. Revelation, the last book of the Bible, describes the chorus of saints,

> And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." (Rev 15:3–4)

In that day, we will have no hesitations or reservations in praising God's justice, truth, and holiness. There will be no problem of evil. What has happened? Has God given us more information so that we understand how all the evil in the world has led to greater good? Or has God simply changed our hearts, so that we are able to see these evils overcome by God's great victory? The passage says only that we are able to bring mighty praise to God for the revelation of his righteous acts. It does not tell us how that revelation comes to us.[10]

All three of these responses are new-mind responses. They do not concede to autonomous man the right to judge whether God is good and powerful. Rather, they accept God himself as the ultimate interpreter of his own actions, even when he surrounds them in mystery. We shall talk more about God's self-revelation in the next few chapters. The first response reminds us of how little we know. The second gives us a promise, which

requires us to view earth's troubles with faith. The third shows how we will think one day when the new mind is perfected in us.

The new mind trusts that God alone has the final word about evil. The message of the Bible displays what God has done, and is doing, about evil. And it displays his own agony as he joins with us in our suffering and pain. He is in Jesus, as he descends to the lowest depth, in death itself. So the new mind trusts that he, and only he, has the final answer. Without him, as we have seen, good and evil have no meaning. With him, we have a friend who carries us through the deepest valley of the shadow of death. So evil is itself an evidence for God.

CHAPTER 12

Does God Speak to Us?

We have been exploring what, according to Paul, is "clearly perceived" in the world God has made (Rom 1:20). In fact we know quite a bit about God from this revelation. We know that he exists, has eternal power, and we know that he has the attributes, qualities, which the ancients labeled "divine nature" (same verse). That includes especially his concern about right and wrong. We have seen that already, in chapters 9 and 10; for our own sense of right and wrong is one of the most powerful evidences of God's existence. And Paul, in the rest of Romans 1, says that denial of God leads to idolatry (verse 23), sexual sin (verses 24–27), and indeed sin of all sorts (verses 28–32).

Our conscience implicates us in all this. It tells us that we cannot stand before the judgment of a righteous and holy God.

So the evidence of God, evidence everywhere, is also divine speech. God is giving us a message. He tells us that in denying God, we have denied the law of our own being. This is the reason why society is as bad as it is (recall chapter 9). This is the reason why we need a new mind, so that we can see everything in a new way (2 Cor 5:17).

God's message to us, however, is not entirely negative. It tells us that the world is not the product (and exhibition) of blind chance, but a work of art, produced by one who cares about goodness and beauty. Everyone, even the poorest of us, has experienced the goodness of God. Everyone among us has experienced the blessing of life itself and the privilege of living in this good world.

So Paul said to the pagans at Lystra that God "did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). These are the same pagans that Paul condemned in the first chapter of Romans:

deniers of God, enemies of God. The amazing reconciliation of these truths is that God *loves* his enemies (Matt 5:43–48).

But how can God love his enemies, knowing that they are doomed to everlasting judgment? That is a profound question that we must discuss later. For now, however, let us recall that in Acts 14:17 God's benevolence is a "witness." A witness of what? In Acts 17:27, he tells another group of pagans, living in Athens, that God planted them in time and place "that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him." God wants each of us to become his friend, not to remain his enemy. He wants each of us to confess his existence and nature, to worship him, and therefore to abandon the sinful life Paul describes in Romans 1. He motivates us to repent of our sin (including our sinful mind) by filling us with good things.

What of those who have experienced pain and tragedy? That too is a witness, as we saw in chapter 11. Luke tells us of Jesus' response to reports of tragic happenings:

> There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:1–5)

Terrible events like this remind us that alongside all God's beauty and goodness, there is evil in the world. The beauty, goodness, and tragedy all have one divine purpose: to drive us to repentance. God wants us to turn from sin and to embrace him as a friend. So as we saw in the preceding chapter, even the presence of evil can have a good result.

CHAPTER 13

A Holy Book

We have seen that in the created world, God has given us a remarkable revelation of himself: his existence, attributes, goodness, and coming judgment. In that revelation, he calls us to turn from sin and to be his friends.

But how do we do that? Our past sins weigh heavily on us. Even if we could reform ourselves, get rid of all our bad habits and lead exemplary lives from now on, we are still sinners because of what we have done in the past. A righteous God cannot ignore that. And we know in our hearts that in fact we cannot break those old habits. We have no moral strength to do that. As Paul says in Romans 8:8, "those who are in the flesh cannot please God." Underscore the "cannot" in that statement. The "flesh" here is human life in enmity with God, weak and unable to do what is right.

But God's revelation in the created world seems to fail us at this point. It shows that we are in a situation we can't handle, but it doesn't give us a way out.

It does point in the direction of something more. When Paul preached at Athens, he ended his message this way:

> Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:29–31)

There is something new here, a historical development. God's revelation in the created world is mostly constant. Though it vacillates somewhat between blessing and tragedy, it always sets forth the same message: God is our creator, who cares about right and wrong. He calls us to repent of sin and

become his friends. That message has been constant since man first sinned. But Paul's sermon announces something new. God has "overlooked" the idolatry of the past, but now he has made a new demand for repentance.

The reason for the new demand is that judgment is coming. Judgment has always been coming, of course. But now we can expect it with more intensity, because God has already prepared the courtroom. And the judgment is to come in a strange way. God will do it, as everyone has expected; but he will do it "by a man." That is the new twist, the something more. What man can this be? By Luke's account, Paul in Athens wasn't able to say much about this human-divine judge. The story doesn't even mention this man's name. But Paul gives the Athenians a sure way to identify the judge: he is the one whom God has raised from the dead.

A few people believed Paul; some others suspended judgment. But some "mocked" (verse 32), because to them the idea of a resurrection from the dead was laughable. Some, perhaps, like Rudolf Bultmann (chapter 3), were generally skeptical of stories about the supernatural. Others may have held the view of many Greek philosophers that matter was something ugly, or even unreal, and that no man would ever resume bodily existence after he had died and become an immaterial spirit. Surely, the minds of the mockers were not open. Like Bultmann, they refused to take Paul seriously. They persisted in old-mind thinking.

But it makes far better sense to listen further to Paul's message. God's creational revelation has forced us into a corner. How can we escape the burden of our own sin? We cannot do it on our own. Nor can we grasp it with our old-mind reasoning process. We need help from God, both morally and intellectually. We need to loosen our mental constrictions and at least listen to something new. The Athenians, Luke tells us, "would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new" (Acts 17:21). That was their boast, no doubt. But here was Paul, with the newest message they had ever heard, and some mocked.

This new message requires a new medium: a preacher, in this case Paul. The story of the coming new judge and his resurrection is not written in the skies or in the recurring fruitful seasons. It is the narration of a non-recurrent event, something that happened only once. It was witnessed not by

everybody, but by some, and God called that limited group of witnesses to tell the story all over the earth (Matt 28:18–20).

Eventually, some of those witnesses wrote down the story of Jesus, the new judge, so that they could better remember it and so that it could reach more people. Those who believed the story put those writings together with the sacred books of the Jews. They called the Jewish Bible the "Old Testament" and the story of Jesus the "New Testament." Together, these books governed the new Christian community.

Doesn't that make sense? It does, once you grant the possibility that God may have acted in history to forgive our sins and make us his friends. Obviously such divine intervention is a stupendous event, the most important event in history. We should not be surprised that it was attended by supernatural events, particularly the resurrection of the Redeemer. And it should not surprise us that God would use extraordinary means to get that story to us, even a holy book. But when you think about it, what alternative was there? How else would someone get the word out about an event that happened once in the first century?

Some, like Bultmann, speaking for "modern man," mock the very idea of a holy book. But that mockery comes from the old mind. The new mind will perceive that if God is almighty, he has the right and the power to rule his people with a book. The very fact that proud, sophisticated modern people laugh at this idea is actually a point in its favor. For God says, according to the book in question, "for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor 1:18). Like the cross itself, the holy book is a "foolish" means that God has chosen "to shame the wise" (1 Cor 1:27).

CHAPTER 14

THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD

Let's think some more about the holy book, for we can learn much more about God from it.

We have seen that God does speak to us. He is a personal being, and persons typically communicate with other persons. God communicates through the creation, promising judgment for those who disobey him and blessing for those who obey. But that revelation in nature is incomplete. God wants to tell us also about the mysterious judge Paul refers to in Acts 17, the one who is raised from the dead.

That is, he wants to tell us a story. But to tell a story, you need to have something more than nature. Nature can tell you certain constant truths, but it cannot tell you what happened on a particular date. For that, you need a storyteller, as Paul was at Athens. And it helps if someone writes the story down.

So this revelation comes from God, to a storyteller, to a written document. But, as with revelation in creation, God never goes away and leaves the storyteller and document by themselves. He stays with them, telling the story through them and in them.

Among the ancient Hebrews, the written stories were something very special. After God delivered Israel from Egypt, Moses met God on Mt. Sinai and received the Ten Commandments. In this document, God begins by telling Israel that he was the one who delivered them out of slavery (Exod 20:2). This story, and the commandments, were written on tablets of stone by the very finger of God (Exod 24:12; 31:18; 32:16; 34:1). God is not only the author of this document, speaking in the first person, but the publisher as well. He asked Moses to put these tablets in the most sacred place, by the ark of the covenant (Deut 31:26). From the beginning, the text was a *holy* Scripture, with a special connection to God himself. Through history, God

added to these words, so that they became a large collection (as Deut 32:46–47; Josh 24:25–28).

In the New Testament, Paul urges his disciple Timothy to consult this collection of writings:

> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16–17)

To say that God "breathed out" these words is to say that God *spoke* them. Paul is saying that they are nothing less than the written word of God. So the Christian church has ever since looked at these books as holy Scripture.

If you dare to say in polite society that you believe these words are God's own sayings, you will likely be called names: fundamentalist, religious fanatic, Bible-thumper, and much, much worse. As Bultmann taught us, this view is not acceptable to "modern man." But name-calling is often a strategy of people who don't like a view but don't have an argument against it. Such names are expressions of emotion, but we should not honor them as rational arguments. At the very most, such people are telling us that they cannot accept *anything* supernatural.

But that is obviously the thinking of the old mind. The new mind, in this case, is far more open. The new mind observes that if God wants to give us an important message, the most natural thing in the world is for him to distribute it as a text containing his own words.

But the old mind has other arguments, much better ones, because more specific. Certainly if the Bible is the word of God, it must be without error. But ever since the biblical books were written, some people have complained about "mistakes" in the text. Geisler and Howe say that there are around 800 questions raised about the truthfulness of the Bible.[1] Believers cannot ignore these questions. But neither can they ignore the web of truth that reinforces their own belief in God. Many of the complaints against the truth of the Bible are at the same time complaints against the theistic worldview itself. And let us recall that our evidence for the theistic worldview is substantial; indeed, everything is evidence (chapter 11).

So if someone objects to a Bible story on the grounds that it is miraculous or supernatural, we can dismiss that objection quickly. We know that the miraculous is possible, because God exists, and the evidence for his existence is overwhelming.

But other Bible problems are not so easily resolved. Some complaints about the Bible do not rest on a general rejection of the supernatural. For example, many have noted that Matthew (4:5–10) presents the wilderness temptations of Jesus in a different order from Luke (4:5–12). Matthew lists the temptation at the pinnacle of the temple as the second, while Luke places it third. But we should note that ancient historical writers do not always list events in chronological order, as modern historical texts usually do. In this case, most likely Matthew records the temptations chronologically, while Luke rearranges them so as to build toward a climax in the pinnacle temptation. The terms Luke uses are less time specific than those of Matthew.[2]

Did Matthew or Luke make an error here? Luke does not claim, in my view, to present these events in precise order; so of course we should not charge him with error for his lack of precision, especially when he uses this imprecision for a perfectly respectable purpose. In any case, imprecision is not the same thing as error; it is a necessary aspect of clear communication. If someone asks my age, and I give it to him down to the day, hour, second, and millisecond, that excess precision only hinders the communication of truth.

But in the end, the question depends on the reader's mindset. An old-mind reader will often be disturbed by anything odd in the text, anything that raises problems of interpretation. And he is quick to jump to the conclusion that the problem arises because of error in the text. A new-mind reader may find the problem interesting, but he will not think it urgent to get an explanation. The new mind thinks, "God understands it all, and it is not hard to imagine that he had a good purpose in this way of telling his story."

My testimony is that when I read the Bible for my own devotions, to edify myself, it is very rare that I feel the need of some explanation of a problem passage. How could there be light and darkness on the earth (Gen 1:3–5) before there were heavenly bodies to produce the light (Gen 1:14–18)? I don't know. But as I read with my new mind, I assume that somehow God provided light in the first passage by an unknown mechanism and then later

provided the sun and moon to measure and maintain those phenomena. For him, it really would not have been hard.

Where did Cain get his wife? I don't know. God provided one from somewhere. I don't need to know. If I did need to know, God would have told me. My lack of an answer does not affect my faith, for I believe in God on the basis of overwhelming evidence.

CHAPTER 15

JESUS

You cannot read far in the Bible without encountering Jesus. We meet him not only in the four Gospels that narrate his life on earth, but also in the Old Testament, which looks forward to one who will redeem us from sin.[1] Jesus himself said that the Law and the Prophets testified about him (Luke 24:27; cf. John 5:39). And all the New Testament is preoccupied with who Jesus was and what he did.

What he was, was the baby born in Bethlehem, whom we celebrate at Christmas time. But he was much more. Angels announced his coming birth (Matt 1:20–21; Luke 1:26–38; 2:8–14). When I first went to college, I went to a church where a campus chaplain led us in singing lustily the old carols, like "Angels We Have Heard on High" and "Angels from the Realms of Glory." Then in his sermon he debunked it all: none of this could have happened, he said. The idea that angels worshiped Jesus was "post-resurrection thinking." It was not obvious that the chaplain actually believed in the resurrection. He was one of those modern preachers, who impressed his hearers mainly by telling them what he did not believe. He was up to date on the thinking of the old mind. But new-mind people are not convinced by that kind of argument. If there really is a God, and there really are angels, and if those angels know something of God's plans, then it should not be surprising that those angels should want to celebrate the coming of the Redeemer. Perhaps Luke didn't imagine this until after the resurrection—but the angels did.

Undoubtedly Jesus was a man. A good man, but more. Later the apostle Peter would say, "He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

He did good, but his goodness went beyond the usual goodness. He was able to heal disease and perform other miracles as the occasion required. He also taught. His teachings set forth a way of life both attractive and

perplexing. Who would not want to live in a world where everyone loved their enemies (Matt 5:43–48)? But what about a world in which telling somebody "you fool" would make one liable to hellfire (Matt 5:22)? Or in which people tore out their eyes to keep from lusting (Matt 5:29)? Or in which people offer the left cheek to one who slaps them on the right (Matt 5:39)? Jesus' ethic was angular, in obvious ways impractical. But the people who heard him sensed that there was something here of the world to come. "The crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt 7:28–29).

And people discerned from that that he had a special relationship with God. Nor did he try to hide that special relationship:

> So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. (John 5:19–24)

His words and behavior were so unique that his disciples believed these outrageous claims. They called him "Lord," using the Greek equivalent of *Yahweh*, the mysterious name of God given to Moses in Exodus 3:15 (see Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3; Phil 2:11). They called him "son of God," a phrase that sometimes applies to devout human beings; but in Jesus' case it had a far greater meaning (Matt 11:25–27; John 17:1–5; cf. John 5:19–24, cited earlier). They called him "Christ," the expected descendant of David, who was also David's lord according to Psalm 110:1. And they called him God:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was

made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1–14; cf. 1:18; 20:28; Acts 20:28; Rom 9:5; 1 Tim 3:15–16; 2 Thess 1:12; Heb 1:8; 1 John 5:20; Phil 2:6; Col 2:9).[2]

Here the old mind is completely at a loss. *How can a man be God? It seems that these disciples must be crazy*. The new mind replies: if this is God's world, and he wishes to redeem the world by sending his own Son, why should anyone object? God's decision to send Jesus is nothing but a marvelous exhibition of his love.

CHAPTER 16

THE DEATH OF JESUS

Why did Jesus, the Son of God, become man? He came to die in our place, to die the death we should have died because we had sinned against God:

> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. (Rom 3:21–25)
>
> It [faith] will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Rom 4:24–25)
>
> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor 5:21)
>
> For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit. (1 Pet 3:18)

This righteousness of God is his gift to us. We cannot earn it:

> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:8–10)

Good works, we see here, are a result of the gift, not a cause of it. We who receive the gift are "created in Christ," so that we can perform good works.

If we cannot earn salvation by good works, how does salvation come to us? The Bible answers, by faith, as above in Romans 3:25 and Ephesians 2:8. Faith is simple trust. It is expecting God to keep his promise:

> For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.
>
> That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Rom 4:13–25)

God promised Abraham a son, who in turn would beget more children, eventually as many as the sand of the sea; and God would bless them all for the sake of Abraham. That seemed too much for Abraham to believe. How could he have even one son when he was over 100 years old and his wife

Sarah was beyond her childbearing years? But Abraham in the end believed God's promises, not the apparent contrary evidence. He is our model of a new mind. God has promised us also an impossible blessing: that God will forgive our sin through the death of Jesus. All we need to do is believe. One of the best-known verses in the Bible is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Salvation comes from trusting what God says about Jesus.

You see how Scripture contrasts Abraham's faith with our conventional judgments of probabilities. The old mind could never expect that Abraham could have a son with his wife. The old mind would simply reject the possibility. Saving faith is possible only to the new mind. The new mind says that God is fully able to save sinners through the death of Jesus. We don't understand how it can be. But his word promises this salvation, and nothing is more dependable than God's word. If modern man has problems with the idea of blood atonement (making us right with him through the violent death of his Son), then God is fully able to deal with those problems.

Faith in Christ does not come through the reasoning of the old mind:

> For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,
>
> "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
>
> and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."
>
> Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Cor 1:18–25)

Rather, faith in Christ comes through a different kind of wisdom, what I have been calling a new mind, what Paul calls the mind of Christ:

> Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,
>
> "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
>
> nor the heart of man imagined,
>
> what God has prepared for those who love him"—
>
> these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.
>
> The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor 2:6–16)

CHAPTER 17

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Eternal life is a bit much to expect from a dead savior. If he himself did not live, how could he bring life to us?

But he did live, even after he died. The Bible tells us that his disciples buried him in a tomb. The authorities sent soldiers to guard the tomb, to make sure that nobody would steal the body. But at the dawn of the first day of the week, disciples visited the tomb and found it empty. Soon afterward, many people claimed to have seen Jesus still alive. They saw him, talked with him, ate and drank with him, and received new teaching from him. Paul summarizes:

> Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.
>
> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. (1 Cor 15:1–11)

In Acts 17 when Paul preached about the coming judge of all whom God raised from the dead, people mocked. Should we mock as well? A story of someone rising from the dead is difficult to believe, especially for modern men, as Bultmann observed.

But in the time of the apostles many came to believe this story, though both Jews and Romans had a strong interest in suppressing it. And the evidence is strong enough that it has convinced skeptics even today.

If the disciples had stolen the body, where did they put it? Some of them might have avoided death by revealing the hiding place, but they did not. If the event were a fraud, why were Christians willing to die for it? But if the opponents of Christianity had stolen the body, why did they not reveal its location, in order to stop the spread of Christianity once for all?

Other skeptical theories have not received much acceptance. Some have said that Jesus never really died, but only fainted. But the biblical accounts of the risen Jesus present not someone barely alive, but someone triumphant over the gates of death and hell. Some have claimed that the resurrection appearances were hallucinations or visions. But it is not possible for groups of people (particularly the group of "five hundred brothers" Paul mentions in the passage quoted above) to have the same hallucination at the same time. Others have tried to dismiss the whole story as legendary. But the preaching of the resurrection happened too soon after the event for a legend to have taken form.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:5–9 above that the witnesses are numerous, available to confirm the story. And evidently it was credible, for the church grew like wildfire.

But there was more. In 1 Corinthians 15, the most credible evidence for the resurrection is not the weakness of the competing stories or the number and quality of witnesses. It is Paul's own preached word, given when he founded the Church of Corinth. Recall this:

> Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I *preached* to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to *the word I preached to you*—unless you believed in vain. For *I delivered to you* as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the

> Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures … *Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed*. (1 Cor 15:1–4, 11)

The emphasis is mine, but very significant. Paul continues,

> Now if Christ is *proclaimed* as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then *our preaching is in vain* and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. (1 Cor 15:12–15)

Note all the references to Paul's preaching. Paul had founded the church of Corinth by preaching there. His preaching was the word of God; he was nothing less than God's storyteller. God enabled them to receive Paul's message (cf. Acts 16:14). If that story was false, the foundation of the church was false.

So the chief evidence for the resurrection was this: it was part of Paul's apostolic preaching; it was part of the gospel. It was the word of God himself.

So the argument for the resurrection of Jesus is essentially an appeal to the new mind, not the old. It calls us to hear God's word and believe it. The factual evidence for this miracle is strong, but God's word is even stronger. It is a certainty, for if it is not true, then faith is vain. And for the new mind, faith is the very criterion of certainty.

CHAPTER 18

THE HOLY SPIRIT

In the next part of the biblical story, Jesus ascends to heaven (Acts 1:6–11). He had given to the church the task of telling the story worldwide (Matt 28:18–20). Now he sends the Holy Spirit to empower them for that work (Acts 2:1–4).

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament advocate belief in one God, over against the gods of the nations. But in the biblical God there is a complexity, a sort of divine society within him. Although there is one God, there are three "persons": the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These are equally divine (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14), but distinct, so that they can converse with one another, ask favors of one another, express love for one another, and glorify one another. It is all very mysterious. In some sense God is one, and in some other sense God is three (there must be two different senses, or there would be a logical contradiction). The church has spoken of three "persons," but it has never defined, nor quite understood, what it means to be a divine "person." The new mind understands, however, that there are depths in God that we may never be able to formulate precisely.

The Holy Spirit is the author of the new mind. He enters us and creates us anew (2 Cor 5:17) from within. The Bible calls this being "born again" (John 3:1–15), a renovation that affects everything we are: choices, feelings, and mind. Since God has forgiven our sins for Jesus' sake, the Holy Spirit will not allow them to dominate our lives (Rom 8:9–17). It is not that we never commit sin (1 John 1:8, 10), but that we are no longer in bondage to it (John 8:31–34). We can say no.

The Bible describes different events in this process of renovation. There is the new birth itself, which theologians call "regeneration." The Spirit also gives faith and repentance, which theologians combine under the label "conversion." There is "justification," which means that God, the supreme judge, regards us as righteous, for the sake of Christ's righteousness (Rom

3:21–26). “Adoption” means that we become part of God’s family (Rom 8:14–16). “Sanctification” means that the Spirit makes us holy (1 Cor 1:2; Eph 5:26; 1 Thess 4:3–4). “Glorification” is the consummation of sanctification (2 Cor 4:17), our sharing in the presence of God.

So the new mind results from a deep, inward change. It is not just a change of opinion or ideology. It is a work of God’s own Holy Spirit. It governs every area of our lives. It expresses our deepest loyalty and certainty. To compromise it is to compromise our very being, what we most truly are.

So the new mind is not merely the addition of a few new beliefs to our old mind: for example, the existence of God and the deity of Christ. The new mind is a whole new web of beliefs, choices, and feelings (chapters 5–6). We can understand why it would seem very odd to people who are still thinking in the old way.

CHAPTER 19

READING THE BIBLE

Christians do many of the same things as non-Christians. We get up in the morning, brush our teeth, put on our clothes, have breakfast, head off to work, and so on. But there are a few activities Christians often do that non-Christians rarely or never do: among them, reading the Bible, praying, and going to church. In these activities, the Holy Spirit reinvigorates the new mind. And the new mind, in turn, makes everything else in life different.

These activities are not ways of earning eternal salvation. As we saw in chapter 16, salvation is "the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8–9). But people who have received this gift seek daily to renew their relationship with God. For that, these activities are important.

First, we read the Bible. The reason is that the Bible is nothing less than God speaking to us (see chapters 12–14). It is the content of our faith, the original story of our salvation. It does us good to hear it again and again. We sometimes tend to forget what God has done for us. The Bible reminds us. It is like a love letter from him.

It also tells us what he wants us to do. So it contains commands, laws, such as the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. In the Bible, the highest authority in the universe tells us what is true and right, and how we need to change in order to conform to his standards. Because he loves us so much, we want to please him.

But it speaks, and not only of big moral issues like murder and adultery. It also gets into the details of our practical lives. The book of Proverbs, for example, urges wisdom: "A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother" (10:1). It is obvious, of course, that wisdom is a good thing and foolishness is bad. But this verse makes us ask the effect of our patterns of behavior on our parents: will they be happier because of the pattern of our lives? That goes beyond a bald statement of abstract morality. So Scripture presents the good life, the life pleasing to God, using many

questions we should ask, many illustrations, many metaphors. By stories, proverbs, parables, it indicates the consequences of obeying and disobeying God. The Christian should want to get these teachings deep into his heart, for they come from God, and they change our lives.

As we read, we note that there are important connections between what God has done for us (the "indicative," in theological jargon) and the "imperative," what he wants us to do for him. For example, in Colossians 3:1–4, Paul says this:

> If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

In the first verse, the indicative is that we "have been raised with Christ." That is a remarkable way of describing what Christ has done for us and how the Spirit has united us to him. We don't usually think of ourselves as having been with Christ when he rose from the dead. But Paul says that we were, in some mysterious way (cf. his longer formulation in Rom 6:1–11). Our regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, and sanctification all are part of this "union with Christ." But in Colossians 3:1, the picture is dramatic, linked to the story of Christ himself. To Paul, we are all part of that story. We died with him to sin; we rose with him to righteousness, and (verse 4) when he returns in glory, we will be with him.

But then comes the imperative. If we have been raised with Christ up to heaven, then why do we treat the affairs of earth as having supreme importance? What is most important is heaven, and heaven's program. Elsewhere in Scripture, this program is called the "kingdom of God." It is God's historical project of defeating his enemies and bringing all to a conscious acknowledgement of his rule. It is the establishment of worship upon the earth. So, we are to "seek the things that are above."

That is what is most important to the new mind. When a political issue comes up, we are not interested primarily in seeking benefit for the Republicans, or the Democrats, or some other faction. We are interested in the kingdom of God. So we search for the alternative that is "most biblical."

In passages like Romans 13:1–7, we learn that the government is not God, so we do not seek the expansion of government for its own sake. The New Testament gives many examples of governments that overstep their bounds and become tyrannical, persecuting the kingdom of God, rather than protecting it. Government is not our lord or our savior.

But God has appointed civil rulers as his servants ("ministers" in some translations). Christians should honor them and pay taxes to them, thanking God that he has appointed them to keep order in society, bringing God's own wrath (Rom 13:4) on wrongdoers.

Care for the poor is very important in Scripture, both in the Old Testament and in Jesus' teaching. The prophets threaten judgment on Israel for their selfish oppression of the poor. So our social order should be a fair one, one that gives poor people opportunity to prosper. The Bible suggests, however, many ways of helping the poor other than government action (see Exod 23:11; Deut 15:1–8; Lev 19:10; 25:25; Acts 2:44–45). So it opens our minds to possibilities not often considered in the present political dialogue. Often the new mind perceives courses of action beyond the conventional wisdom, because it knows the wisdom of God's word.

CHAPTER 20

PRAYING

In the Bible, God speaks to us. In prayer, we speak to God. So the Christian has a two-way conversation with his Lord. In describing prayer, I shall make use of the Lord's Prayer, the prayer Jesus taught his disciples (Matt 6:9–13).

In prayer, we *praise* God, telling him how wonderful he is (Matt 6:9). The old mind, listening to this, tends to think that God is on an ego trip. But the new mind says that (1) God *deserves* to be praised, above all other beings in the world. And (2) some of the happiest times we have with other people are the times we honor them—for birthdays, special achievements, or just because we love them. God has given us the opportunity to honor him that way, all the time. Should we not take up that opportunity?

We also ask him to *forgive* our sins. Of course, in Christ he has forgiven our sins once for all, past, present, and future. But he wants us to *ask* him to apply the blood of Christ to specific sins. ("Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors," Matt 6:12.) How good it is to be able to share with him every sin that burdens our heart, with the assurance that he will not judge us for it, but will freely forgive. Jesus understood that even though his people are fully cleansed, we pick up dirt from the world every day, and we need to wash our feet (John 13:10). But Jesus does that too, always the servant to his people as well as their lord.

In prayer we also *thank* God. Thanksgiving is similar to praise, but more specific. We thank God for providing what we need ("our daily bread," Matt 6:11), for rescuing us from disaster (often in the Psalms; e.g., Pss 22:22–24; 107), for the blessings of salvation he has given to ourselves and other believers (Rom 1:8; 6:17; 1 Cor 1:4). Thanksgiving reminds us that every good thing in our lives comes from God (Jas 1:17), that we are not the authors of our own prosperity.

Finally, prayer is *supplication*.[1] We ask God for everything we need (Matt 6:11): for food, healing, wisdom, gifts of the Spirit, and growth in

grace, in ourselves and others. Paul prays this way for the Ephesian Christians:

> I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:16–23)

We pray alone, but it is also good to pray with other Christians. Jesus promises, "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven" (Matt 18:19).

Jesus gives his people lavish promises about what prayer can accomplish, such as, "And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith" (Matt 21:22). That might sound as if we could pray for just anything—a big car, a motorboat, a new watch—and expect it to arrive within a week, or immediately. Of course, that has nothing to do with the context of Jesus' promise. He is presupposing that he and the disciples are together waging war against Satan and his human accomplices. It is in that battle that God answers such extraordinary prayer.

But old-mind people often bring up "unanswered prayer" as an objection to the gospel. Scripture often deals with this issue. God's promise to answer prayer is not unconditional. Prayer that God answers must be "in Jesus' name," with his authorization (John 14:13; 16:23–24; Eph 5:20). It is prayer according to God's will (1 John 5:14–15), in faith (Matt 21:22; Mark 11:24; Jas 1:6) and obedience (Ps 66:18; 1 John 3:21–22). Scripture also says that certain attitudes are appropriate to prayer: humility (Matt 6:5; Luke 18:11–

13), persistence (Ps 27:14; Luke 6:12; 1 Thess 5:17), earnestness (as Dan 9:19). None of this would make any sense if answers to prayer were entirely unconditional.

But to look at the matter more broadly: the Christian's relationship to God is like that of a little child to a kind Father. The Father wants his child to ask him for help. He intends to meet all the desires of his child's heart. But he will answer the child's requests according to his own wisdom, not the child's—and therefore all the more lavishly. The new mind will find in this his Father's right and love. Therefore he will continue to pray, in patience.

CHAPTER 21

GOING TO CHURCH

I said that Christians frequently do three things that non-Christians rarely or never do: reading the Bible, praying, and going to church. In this chapter I will discuss the third of these.

The church is not just a "Christian club." It is the "body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:27) and the "bride of Christ" (Eph 5:22–33; Rev 21:2, 9; 22:17). Jesus shed his blood for the church, not just for individuals (Acts 20:28). That Jesus established a church is part of the good news, the gospel. He assures us that he will guard the church, so that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18).

Many people, even professing Christians, take church attendance as an optional extra in the Christian life. They go if they're not too tired, if there are no sports on TV, if someone begs them to come. Most people think of church as something similar to a movie or concert, where people go to watch or listen to something. The usual seating plan, with the people in rows of seats and leaders up front, encourages the analogy with entertainment. If that were the point of it, we could sympathize with people who think of church as an optional extra. Whatever there is to watch or hear could be watched or heard at another time, and a person would not be harmed much if he misses it altogether.

But the writer of Hebrews says,

> And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day[1] drawing near. (Heb 10:24–25)

This writer sees the church meeting not as listening to speeches and music, but as a time when all believers take responsibility for one another. There are some leaders, of course (1 Tim 3:1–13). But their role is to help

Christians encourage one another, not to take all the work of encouragement upon themselves (Eph 4:11–12; cf. 1 Cor 14:26). Most centrally, the chief encourager is God himself, who blesses us with his word, prayer, and sacrament (see below).

The church meeting includes, typically, the reading of the Bible (cf. chapter 19) and prayer (cf. chapter 20). With the reading of the Bible usually comes some teaching that explains and applies the text to the hearers. The prayer includes both music and spoken words. Hymns and songs often fall into the four types of prayer I mentioned in chapter 20. They also serve as a form of Bible teaching (chapter 19). Music helps to bring the words of Scripture and prayer into the hearts of the worshipers.

In addition to the Bible and prayer, worship services include something that cannot be done by individuals: the sacraments. Sacraments are object lessons that dramatize the gospel and seal its blessings and responsibilities to the hearts of worshipers. In Protestant churches there are two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper.[2] Baptism is the entrance rite to the church, given either to an adult (upon profession of faith) or to a believer's child (upon the parents' profession).[3]

The Lord's Supper re-enacts an event from the last meal Jesus had with his disciples before his crucifixion. He handed bread to them, saying "This is my body," and wine to them, saying "This is my blood." The rite symbolizes the gospel, Jesus' death on our behalf; and it seals to us the new covenant[4] in his blood (1 Cor 11:25).

In these ways, church is a meeting between God and his people. Through word, prayer, and sacrament it confirms those habits of life and thought that constitute the new mind.

It may also be a means by which a nonbeliever can become a Christian. Listen to this:

> But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you. (1 Cor 14:24–25)

"Prophesying" can have different meanings in different situations, but it is always a speaking forth of the word of God. Today the word of God

continues to disclose the secrets of our hearts (Heb 4:12–13) and provoke worship. So going to church can be dangerous to people who are determined to think in the old way. Church is one important place where God implants in people new hearts, new minds.

CHAPTER 22

THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

All this talk about going to church might suggest that the church is a building where people meet. But in the Bible, the church is people. A local pastor opens the worship service by thanking the people for "bringing the church into this room." That's a good way of putting it. The church is not the room, but the people in it, the body of Christ. And those people also bring the church *outside* the room when the service is over.

The main task of the church is to *go* somewhere. Here is the last command of Jesus before he ascended to heaven:

> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:18–20)

We have seen that God works in church services to turn unbelievers into believers. More typically, however, Christians go where the unbelievers are, after the church service is over, and preach the gospel to them (Rom 10:13–17). This is called *evangelism*. Some people despise this activity, calling it names like "proselytizing." Obviously it needs to be done with graciousness and gentleness (1 Pet 3:15). But there is no way to avoid the fact that Christianity is an evangelistic religion. The biblical God wants everybody to become Christian.

To the old mind, this is one of the least attractive features of Christianity. Non-Christians tend to think that one religion or philosophy is as good as another. On that basis, religions are private opinions, and nobody ought to try to get someone else to change. But to the new mind, the gospel is true, and

therefore evangelism is an expression of divine love. Without Christ, people perish (Luke 13:3, 5; John 3:16; 1 Cor 1:18).

So Christians can never accept the attempts of secular society to stifle evangelism, to prevent the expression of the gospel. As the apostles said to the authorities of their day, who tried to stop them from preaching, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29; cf. 4:19–20).

But the church in the world is not only engaged in direct evangelism. As we have seen, Christians in the world think and act differently from other people, in all areas of life. As Paul said, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). As with everyone else, when Christians go out into the workplace, they bring their values with them. If they are in business, they seek to carry on business according to biblical ethical standards. If they are teaching philosophy, or chemistry, or biology, or history, they seek to teach in a way that is consistent with the Bible. If they work in the arts, they seek to reflect the excitement and beauty that God has built into the world. If they work in government, they seek to honor biblical teachings about the limits and blessings of government.

Christians are, of course, subject to no illusions about the likelihood that their efforts will transform the society any time soon. Large-scale transformation of the earth and its culture will not take place without the work of the Holy Spirit to convert people's hearts; and indeed it may not happen until the "new heavens and the new earth" that follow the last judgment. But Christians must be faithful. They cannot encourage the current degeneration of culture. They must rather seek to counter that degeneration and support movements that do the same.

When they have done this in the past, there have been good results. Christians played an important role in the development of universities and hospitals, in improving the care of orphans and widows, in abolishing slavery, in elevating the arts. Of course, Christians have not always been consistent with their best vision, and they have sometimes been defeated by those who insist on old-mind values. But whatever the results, Christians must seek the results that honor God.

As Christians cannot accept the world's attempts to stifle evangelism, so they cannot accept its attempts to stifle the expression of Christian values in

the academy, the marketplace, politics, or general culture. The old mind spreads the view that "religion" is a subjective experience which may have value for people who keep it to themselves, but it should play no role in the making of society. But to the new mind, the gospel is truth, and controversies about it are controversies about truth. So in a country that is supposed to be open to people of all views, the Christian gospel may not be excluded by placing on it the label of "religion." It makes a truth claim, and it has as much right to speak as any other philosophy, scientific theory, or political ideology.

CHAPTER 23

RELIGION

But let us assume that the modern cultural prejudice against religion could be overcome.[1] Let us assume that people and institutions become willing to consider religions as truth claims, not merely as private experiences. Then these modern thinkers and institutions would have to return to an old question: which religion, if any, is true?

Ultimately, assurance that the Christian faith is true comes only through the work of the Holy Spirit, creating a new mind in the heart. But he often works in us as we engage in a reasoning process. So let me present some considerations.

The many religions of the world, other than Christianity, may be divided into three general types: religions of fate, self-realization, and law.[2] Religions of fate revere an impersonal principle behind all reality, behind gods and men. Examples of this can be found in the ancient Greek religion and other forms of polytheism. But an impersonal principle does not speak (review chapter 7). It cannot tell us what is right or wrong, what is true or false. It is impossible to have any kind of personal relationship with fate. So believing in it makes no difference in one's life. There is no grace or redemption.

Religions of self-realization include the great ethnic religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism, also Western Gnosticism. But these are ultimately *monistic*. That is, they teach that there is only one ultimate reality. If gods exist, they are part of the same being as ours. We are they, and they are us. So they are as dependent on us, ultimately, as we are on them. And ultimately our goal is to perfect ourselves, so that we can realize our own divinity. Doing this, we rise above the dichotomies of present experience to a realm beyond good and evil, right and wrong. As with the religions of fate, there is no grace or redemption from the sin that we know exists within us.

The third type of religion is derived from the Bible, but with the redemptive content removed. In Islam, for example, there is a God who is more or less personal. But Muslims resist any notion of having a personal relationship with Allah, and they deny the idea of Allah entering history as in the Christian view of Jesus. Allah deals with sin, but not with consistency; so nobody can have any assurance of whether or not Allah will be merciful to him. As with the other types of religions, grace and redemption are absent.

As we saw in chapter 7, only in biblical religion is there a God who is both absolute and personal. So only he, among all the gods, controls all things and speaks to us to offer us grace and redemption. He also speaks to condemn the other religions as idol worship (Isa 40:18–20; 44:8–20; Acts 17:22–31; Rom 1:22–23).

CHAPTER 24

PHILOSOPHY

The religions are not the only competitors of Christianity. There are others, some called philosophies. As I see it, there is not much difference between religions and philosophies, except that philosophies are not often committed to liturgical practices. My definition of philosophy is "a disciplined exposition and defense of a worldview." A worldview is a conception of the whole of reality, including metaphysics (theory of being), epistemology (theory of knowledge), and axiology (theory of value). It is possible, then, for a philosophy to be either Christian or non-Christian. But except for the medieval period, philosophy in the West has been a largely secular affair, avoiding the influence of religion.

Western philosophy began in Greece, where several thinkers (Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes) determined to examine the world through reason rather than by means of the religious philosophy that was then current. Their trust in reason took the form of a belief in intellectual autonomy (which I discussed in chapter 4). So the first philosophers were *rationalists*: they believed that human reason needed no help from outside itself to gain knowledge of the world. Indeed, they believed that human reason was the ultimate criterion of truth.

Later philosophers however, like the Sophists, were perplexed by the fact that human reason was prone to error, indeed that different people reasoned very differently and reached different conclusions. So they questioned the very idea that human reason could discover objective truth. They became skeptics, or *irrationalists*. But these irrationalists argued their conclusions from reason; so they were rationalists at a different level. And the rationalists had no compelling reason for their assumption of autonomy; so they were irrationalists at another level. Cornelius Van Til described this vacillation as the "rationalist-irrationalist dialectic." Through the history of philosophy, rationalists jumped to irrationalism when they could not justify

their confidence in reason; and irrationalists jumped to rationalism to justify their intellectual integrity.

I have argued[1] that this pattern has continued into present-day philosophy. Today the divide can be seen in the battles between modernism (roughly, rationalist) and postmodernism (roughly, irrationalist). Only Christianity, abandoning autonomy for trust in God's revelation, presents a suitable account of both the powers and limitations of reason, neither deifying nor denying our rational faculty.

Philosophy can be helpful to Christian thought by helping us formulate ways to describe and argue the Christian worldview, within the presuppositions of the new mind, and by displaying the sharp difference between old-mind thinking and new-mind thinking. This difference, sometimes called the antithesis, is often most clearly shown in the history of philosophy.

CHAPTER 25

MORALITY

In chapters 23 and 24 I have been discussing the debates between Christianity and its chief opponents: alternative religions and philosophies. Morality (ethics) is part of most religions and philosophical systems, including Christianity, but it deserves independent discussion.[1]

Christianity is not primarily an ethic, but its main message is about man's ethical rebellion and God's work to put it right. So it has much to say about right and wrong, as in the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. The biblical ethic has deeply influenced the morality of Western civilization. But in the last century that influence has waned rapidly, first in Europe, then in America.

The most obvious example of the culture's rejection of Christian moral standards is in the area of sexual morality. Obviously, sex is one of the most common topics in our cultural discussions of ethics. We see this in discussions of same-sex marriage, more broadly the practices abbreviated as LGBTQ. It is becoming common for Christians to lose jobs because they hold traditional Christian beliefs in these areas. But sex is also an important concern of Scripture itself. In Romans 1:18–32, a passage to which I have often referred in this book, Paul lists sexual sins as the first consequence of worshiping false gods:

> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.
>
> Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

> For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.
>
> And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. (Romans 1:22–32)

Here God responds to the religious sin of idolatry (verses 22, 23, and 25) by giving the people up to sexual impurity (verses 24, 26–27). Still they did not acknowledge God, so God again gave them up, this time to every manner of sin (verses 28–31). And verse 32 tells us that in this society people do not cover up their evil behavior. There is no shame. Rather, the society gives approval to it.

That this has happened in the modern West (despite its Christian history) needs no documentation. The most conspicuous example is the change in social attitudes toward homosexuality. Once denounced as a sin by all major religions (a rare agreement!), over thousands of years, the practice of homosexuality has in an astonishingly short time become a rights issue. In 1969, the Stonewall riots took place, in which patrons of a gay bar fought back against a police raid. Three days of riots followed, and the result was that the gay rights movement became a large crusade, rather than the work of a small literary circle. Since that time, the opinion-makers among journalists, academics, entertainers, and liberal politicians have argued that the older view is mere prejudice and should be eliminated along with racial and gender prejudice. The difference between these, of course, is that nobody ever said it was immoral to have dark skin or to be a woman. But homosexuality had always been considered a sin by the larger society. The

liberal opinion-makers simply dismissed this argument and blasted their opponents as bigots.

Between 1969 and the present, laws against homosexual behavior were largely rescinded. In the last decade the debate was about same-sex marriage. Many tried to preserve traditional marriage. In 1996, the Defense of Marriage Act, which defined marriage for federal purposes as a relationship between a man and a woman, passed by large majorities in both houses of Congress and was signed by President Clinton. But many states allowed for same-sex marriage. In 2008, California voters passed Proposition 8 to ban same-sex marriage there, but the California Supreme Court overturned that action as unconstitutional. Many supporters of Proposition 8 were threatened and insulted. Now it is common for opponents of same-sex marriage to be sued if, for example, they refuse to rent their property to a homosexual couple. Governments have almost completely changed over from the older view of homosexuality as a sin to the newer view of homosexuality as a civil right.

Philosophers typically claim that moral standards are unchanging. In any case, the pace of moral change has often been very slow. But the change in Western attitudes toward homosexuality has been astonishingly fast—a complete reversal between 1969 and today. Some of us wish we have been given at least a bit of time to think it all through before being treated as bigots.

To the old mind, it is part of the contemporary (and therefore correct) movement to secure equality for all groups. To the contemporary liberal, the issue of group equality is more important than any other, and there is no room for any gradations in the respect due to any group seeking equality.

To the new mind, it is an ill-thought movement to call good evil and evil good (Isa 5:20), all too typical of contemporary thought. It poses the question: is it really possible or wise for a whole nation to overturn an established moral standard in less than fifty years? This seems to me to be a sensible question, and it calls into question the wisdom and moral authority of the old mind.

CHAPTER 26

POLITICS

People often say that you cannot legislate morality. But on the other hand, it is at least as evident that civil laws should agree with moral principles. If we cannot enforce morality, we should not enforce immorality. So there is an obvious connection between the preceding chapter and this one.

So it should make sense that just as Christians derive their morality from Scripture, rather than the changing opinions of human culture, so they should test their political opinions by Scripture as well. The Puritans of New England determined to rule themselves as a theocracy, recognizing God as the King of kings. Since then, American Christians have debated to what extent the civil laws of Scripture should apply to modern governments. But they have always insisted that civil law should not violate the principles of Scripture. Certainly, at the very least, government should not try to obstruct the freedom of Christians to live as God prescribes. For many colonists, freedom to practice their faith was the main reason why they moved to North America.

And so the first amendment to the U. S. Constitution, the first article of the Bill of Rights, reads as follows:

> Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The amendment forbids Congress from creating an established religion, that is, a state church (like the Anglican Church in England). This clause does not forbid religious expression in government, or government support of such expression. It does not even forbid established churches within the new nation, except at the federal level. At the time, there were established churches in the states. Part of the purpose of this amendment was to keep the

federal government from competing with those state churches or interfering with them. In broadening this provision, courts have cited Jefferson's language of the "wall of separation" between church and state. However, this phrase appears in Jefferson's writings, not in any official government document. The phrase comes from Jefferson's 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, replying to their letter of 1801. The letter assures them that their opinions will not be scrutinized by the federal government. So the "wall of separation" is to protect the church from the state, not the other way around. So, although courts have interpreted it differently, there is nothing in the First Amendment that requires government officials to be entirely secular in the conduct of their duties.

Then the amendment protects the "free exercise" of religion. Nothing in the Constitution gives anyone the right to "freedom *from* religion," the right not to be offended by religious expression. But in recent years the federal government has become more and more intrusive into the practice of religious believers. Those who have demonstrated against abortion (the murder of unborn children) have been treated roughly by police and jailed. Christmas decorations have been forbidden in places where they have been displayed for many years. Crosses have been challenged, even in memorials for American soldiers. The health-care law requires Christian business owners to buy health insurance that covers artificial contraception and abortive pills, even when contrary to their convictions. Military chaplains have been rebuked for their refusal to perform same-sex weddings, and even for using the name of Jesus in their prayers.

The Obama administration made the argument that freedom of religion is limited to what happens in the church building. (So churches are an exception to the requirement to provide abortion coverage in healthcare.) So freedom of religion means "freedom of worship." But that certainly was not the meaning of "free exercise" when the Constitution was written. As I indicated in chapter 22, religion is not limited to what we do in the church building. It is emphatically what we do after the service is ended. Our Puritan fathers understood this, and certainly the writers of the Constitution. That is, indeed, the case for all religions, not just Christianity. Every preacher tells his flock that they should practice their faith wherever they go, that they should *not* limit it to their time in public worship.

For a government to forbid the practice of religion in the world is tyranny. This is obvious to people who look at the world with new minds. Here as elsewhere, the position of the old mind reduces to absurdity.

CHAPTER 27

SCIENCE

Probably the strongest arguments against Christianity come from those who say that science contradicts it. Science has earned enormous respect because it has made so many important discoveries and has enabled technologies that virtually define the modern world. Many, therefore, have thought that science is the only reliable means of discovering objective truth—the truth as it really is, apart from fantasy or wishful thinking. Philosophers have sometimes taken this point of view, like Charles S. Peirce, Rudolf Carnap, and Charles Hempel. On the popular level the following type of statement is familiar:

> Ever wonder why most people refuse to discuss religion and politics? I suspect it's because they are both so ambiguous. Isn't it time we built our beliefs on a firm foundation, something which most of us can understand, something which affects our lives every day and we can control? SCIENCE. Think about it.[1]

But the largest number of philosophers of science in the twentieth century have thought otherwise. People like Michael Polanyi, Norwood Hanson, Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend, and Alasdair MacIntyre have pressed the similarities between science and other forms of human thought. Scientists are persons, of course, before they are scientists. They come to their scientific projects with a background of assumptions and experiences that influence their observations and experiments in unpredictable ways. And they carry out these projects with a background from the history of science: previous observations and experiments that often serve as "paradigms" (Kuhn) for their continuing work.

This is just to say that science is like other forms of knowing. The scientist seeks facts that fit into his "web of truth" (chapters 4–6), integrating the facts with his past beliefs, decisions, and feelings.

So scientists don't just go out into the world and record one new fact after another. They look at the world, rather, in terms of their past experience, their scientific paradigms, and indeed their epistemological presuppositions. Those presuppositions can sometimes be described as religious, as when someone assumes that divine providence guides the world or that miracles can happen. But if we consider these to be religious presuppositions, why shouldn't the contrary presuppositions (that there is no providence or miracle) also be considered religious?

Science is like religion, not only in that both are based on presuppositions, but also in both cases shared presuppositions create communities of people with a common goal. Members of the community encourage one another, and they can also challenge one another, enforcing "orthodoxy" in terms of the community paradigms.[2]

This kind of point is not intended to lead to a general skepticism about science. It only seeks to encourage a greater level of humility than one usually finds among scientists who try to rebut Christianity. Christians, too, need to practice this virtue, especially when, like the present writer, they have not been extensively schooled in the sciences. But there are delights awaiting those who look at nature with the new mind I have spoken of. Looking at the world that way can bring a special kind of amazement: "O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (Ps 104:24).[3]

CHAPTER 28

THE RETURN OF JESUS

In chapters 15–18 I narrated the biblical story, focusing on Jesus' human life, his death, his resurrection, and his sending the Holy Spirit. Chapters 19–21 focused on the general nature of the Christian life. Then in 23–27 we looked at the Christian life as a warfare, focusing on conflicts between Christianity and non-Christian religions, philosophies, morality, politics, and science. In this chapter I return to the narrative of the biblical story. One great event remains in our story, the return of Jesus:

> For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thess 4:16–18).

The return of Christ is the "blessed hope" of the church (Titus 2:13). It motivates us to seek greater purity, anticipating what we will be when he appears (1 John 3:2–3). It rearranges our priorities in this life, since we know that the world's glory will be burned up in the final transformation of the world (2 Pet 3:10–13), but what we do for Jesus will not be in vain (1 Cor 15:58). At his return, he will reward our faithful service (e.g., Matt 5:12, 46; 10:41–42).

The idea that all of humankind's ambitions will come to a catastrophic end is particularly offensive to the old mind. Non-Christian science and philosophy have large investments in the idea of uniformitarianism, that is, that the earth has always proceeded by the same laws and regularities and will continue to do so forever and ever. Nobody can doubt, of course, that nature up until now has been *relatively* uniform. That has been our experience. But it is impossible to prove that nature has always behaved that

way or will do so indefinitely into the future. Nor can anyone prove that ultimate explanations for natural events are governed by impersonal things and impersonal laws. Secular thinkers have bought into that view of explanation by a kind of blind faith; but it is just as easy, at least, to explain the uniform behavior of nature by the relative constancy of a divine mind. Still, modern people respond to the doctrine of the return of Christ the way the apostle Peter describes the "scoffers" of his time:

> They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. (2 Pet 3:4–7)

Peter says that believing in the return of Christ requires a new-mind perspective. For according to Scripture, nature's behavior is not perfectly constant, for it is not based on a set of mechanical, impersonal principles. It is based on decisions of a personal absolute, and therefore it can bring surprises. That happened in Noah's flood, and it will happen again: a judgment by fire in this case, rather than water. It was the word of God that created the earth's stability (verse 5), and the same word later that brought devastation, when the personal God decided it was time. The same will happen in the future.

In this case, the Bible does not neglect to tell us why God has not brought the judgment before now:

> But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Pet 3:8–9)

The judgment has not yet come, because God is waiting for all those he has chosen to repent of sin and to trust in Christ. Perhaps you, who read this

book, are among them.

Given a new-mind perspective, it makes perfect sense that God, who made the world to glorify himself, would ordain a time when he would judge its inhabitants and remove the effects of sin. Ignore all the silly predictions, of course: nobody knows the day or the hour (Matt 24:36). People are often tempted to speculate and to fantasize about the end times. But if you limit your attention to what Scripture actually says, allowing Scripture to supply your assumptions and worldview, you will see that the doctrine of Jesus' return to judge the world is an inevitable climax to the biblical story.

CHAPTER 29

EPILOGUE

In this book, I have argued that it is possible to think very differently from the way people are commonly taught to think in the current academic and cultural context. I've called this thinking with a "new mind," though in one sense it is not new. It is the way God intended us to think, the way of thinking mankind rejected in the fall.

At the very least, I hope that I've persuaded you not to take the old way of thinking for granted. Learning is supposed to teach critical thinking, to question reigning authorities. I hope you will learn a deeper skepticism than is common today, the habit of being skeptical about the skeptics.

Understand that we all have presuppositions, so that we are all trying to integrate new ideas into our preexisting web of thought. What constitutes evidence differs from one web to the next.

I hope I've also led you to question the idea that old-mind thinking is unbiased, neutral, objective, while "religious" thinking is subjective fantasy. The next time someone dismisses a Christian doctrine out-of-hand, see if you can't think of how someone might justify belief in that doctrine.

But as you seek to open your mind a bit more, opening it to the influence of the Spirit, it may lead you into an oddly compelling story: that this world is God's world, and that he sent his Son to die for sinners, to rise again, and to return in glory. You may find yourself *wanting* it to be true; for what other way is there for sinful people like us to obtain God's forgiveness? And then you'll notice that the evidence points unanimously toward the truth of this story. And you may commit yourself to Jesus.

Committing your heart to Christ will bring a profound change to your heart, mind, and life. But it is not a difficult commitment to make. Trust Jesus as your savior, the one who died in your place to bring forgiveness of sins. And trust Jesus as your lord, your ultimate authority, whom you will obey without question.

The Bible, prayer, and the church will keep you connected with the Lord. And in time you will know by your own experience that this new worldview makes an inescapable case against the fashionable alternatives. And then, soon, Jesus will return in wonderful glory.

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Preface

1 The books: *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1987) (hereafter, *Knowledge*); *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994) (*Apologetics*); and *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995).

2 Cornelius Van Til, "Why I Believe in God" (Philadelphia: Committee on Christian Education, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, n. d.). I have expounded and commented on this work in my *Cornelius Van Til*, 330–36.

3 These are available through the Covenant Media Foundation.

Chapter 4: Believing and Autonomy

1 I tried to formulate, in general terms, a Christian epistemology in my book *Knowledge*.

2 But see *Knowledge*.

Chapter 5: Believing Something for a Reason

1 The argument for "common sense" as a major source of knowledge was developed by Thomas Reid (1710–1796). Alvin Plantinga and others have advanced this argument more recently.

2 The language of the "web" is associated with the philosopher Willard Quine.

Chapter 6: Believing, Willing, Feeling

1 See, for example, my *Knowledge*, 335–40.

2 Of course, this may not all happen at once. C. S. Lewis described himself as "the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England." See C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2017), 279. But that is the goal. And God enabled Lewis to experience, at some point, a surprising joy.

Chapter 7: The Uniqueness of the Biblical God

1 See my book *Doctrine of God*, especially chapters 1–7.

Chapter 8: Why Believe in God?

1 In my triperspectival understanding, validity is normative, soundness is situational, and persuasion is existential.

Chapter 11: Everything Is Evidence for God

1 Vern Poythress, *Redeeming Science* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 13–31.

2 Poythress, *Redeeming Science*, 18.

3 Poythress, *Redeeming Science*, 20.

4 Poythress, *Redeeming Science*, 20.

5 Poythress, *Redeeming Science*, 22.

6 Poythress, *Redeeming Science*, 23.

7 Poythress, *Redeeming Science*, 24.

8 Poythress, *Redeeming Science*, 24–26. For Scripture speaks of God (the Father) creating the world by his Word (the Son) and his Spirit.

9 I have dealt with some of these in *Doctrine of God*, 160–82, and in *Apologetics*, 149–90. The trouble with most of them is that they try to defend the biblical God with old-mind reasoning.

10 The first response is normative, the second situational, and the third existential.

Chapter 14: The Written Word of God

1 Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 10.

2 For other examples of Bible problems and how we should respond to them, see my *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 183–200.

Chapter 15: Jesus

1 Some of the more important Old Testament prophecies of Jesus: Gen 3:15; Pss 2:7–12; 22 (all); 110:1–4; Isa 7:10–14; 9:6–7; 35 (all); 40:1–8; 42:1–4; 52:7–53:12; 59:1–20; 61:1–11; Dan 7:13–14; 9:24–27; Mic 5:2; Zech 9:9–13; 12:10; Mal 3:1–4; 4:1–5. These were written hundreds of years before the birth of Christ. Read them and think about Jesus.

2 For a more thorough treatment of Jesus' deity in Scripture, see my *Doctrine of God*, 644–85.

Chapter 20: Praying

1 The four types of prayer I have listed can be summarized by the acronym ACTS: adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and supplication. Christians often find this acronym useful in remembering what they should pray about.

Chapter 21: Going to Church

1 The "day" is evidently the day of judgment.

2 Roman Catholics acknowledge seven sacraments: confirmation, confession, marriage, ordination, and dying rites, in addition to baptism and the Lord's Supper. Protestants restrict the number to two because they accept as sacraments only those rites which Christ personally established as means of grace for all his people.

3 That is the prevailing Protestant practice. But Baptists deny baptism to infant children, restricting the rite only to those who are able to make an

intelligent profession for themselves.

4 The covenant is a relationship between God and his people, which subjects us to his commandments and opens us to the blessings of the new life in Christ.

Chapter 23: Religion

1 I think religion is best defined as "the outworking of faith in all of life," a definition suggested by James 1:26–27. The claim to hold a true belief is part of this.

2 I discuss this triad more extensively in relation to ethics in my *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 57–71.

Chapter 24: Philosophy

1 In *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*.

Chapter 25: Morality

1 For a comprehensive treatment of ethical issues, see my *Christian Life*.

Chapter 27: Science

1 Letter from Angel Sanchez to the editor of the *Escondido Times-Advocate* (April 28, 1983). Emphasis his.

2 See Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), esp. 176–81.

3 For a comprehensive analysis of science from a Christian point of view, with help in seeing God's wisdom in creation, see Vern Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006).

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1 I think religion is best defined as "the outworking of faith in all of life," a definition suggested by James 1:26–27. The claim to hold a true belief is part of this.